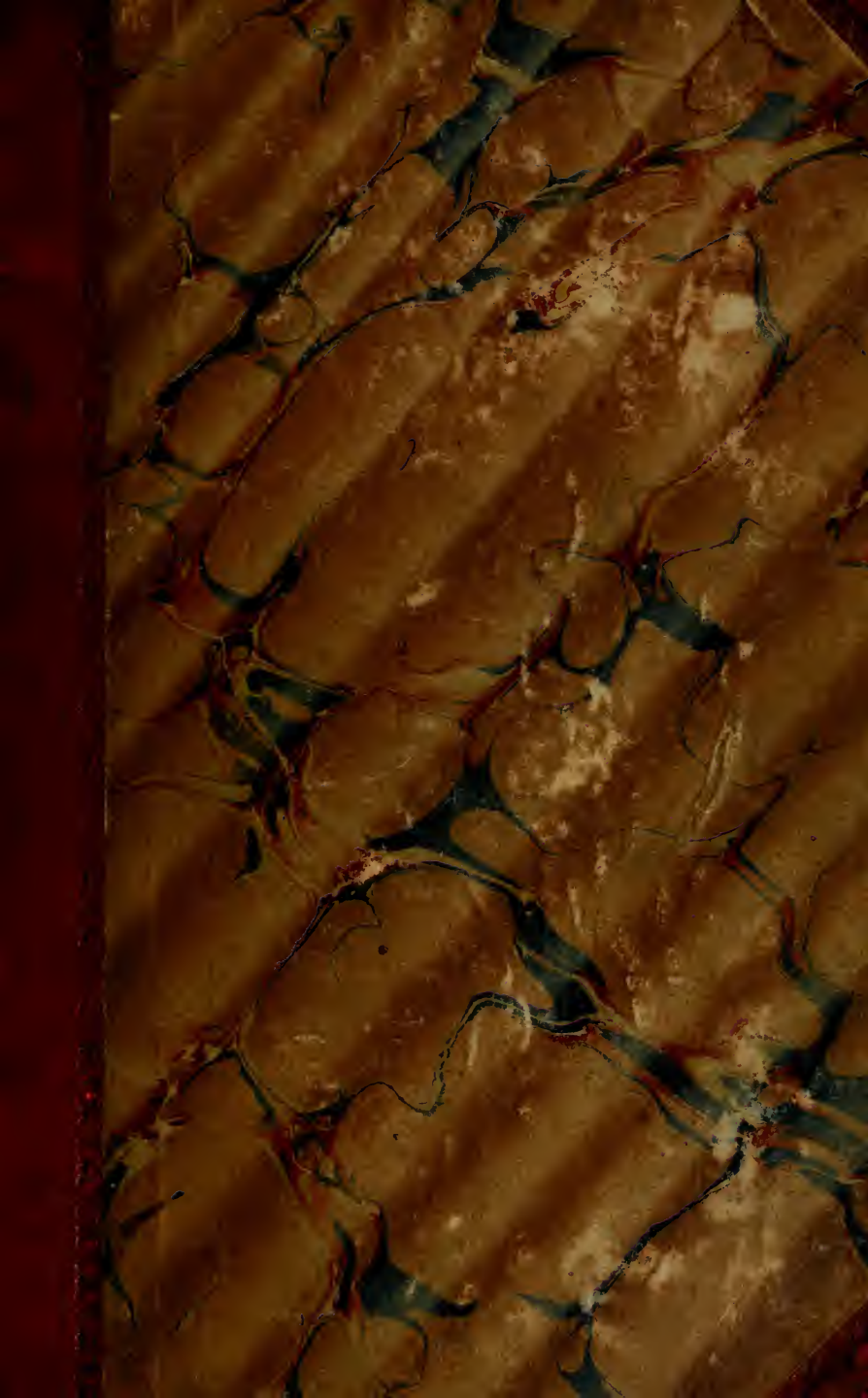
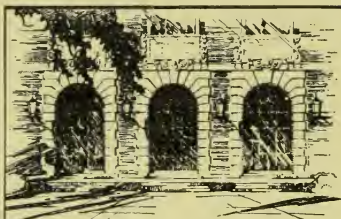






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thus conversing with Mrs. Hylton, he experienced but one serious anxiety—lest the Earl, fatally for his own final peace and happiness, should be permitted to harden himself into hopeless inhumanity, and, in the inscrutable wisdom of the great Orderer of all events, succeed in intercepting the flow of mercy—nay, of justice, and gloat over the sacrifice of one, as guilty, whose innocence he himself would, however unconsciously, have prevented from being vindicated. Mr. Hylton knew the substantial nobleness of the Earl's character, with all the faults which cast baleful shadows around it; and those faults were exactly such as might now be expected in full operation,—hideous serpents writhing around a black pillar of pride. Alas! blind and deadly animosity and revenge would now disguise themselves as retribution and justice! How were they to be unmasked?

To Lord Milverstoke's significant summons, Mr. Hylton returned a courteous reply, which was carried back by one of the Earl's servants, who had been sent a second time to know whether Mr. Hylton had returned from London. The letter simply excused its writer till the evening, at a named hour, on the reasonable and true plea of extreme fatigue from having travelled all night, and also having some matters of importance to transact during the day, in consequence

of his sudden absence from home. Lord Milverstoke's, however, was not the only letter which awaited the arrival of Mr. Hylton. It seemed that, during the Saturday, Mr. Merton, the husband of Mr. Hylton's correspondent, who, unknown to herself, had rendered him such service with the Lord Chief Justice, having returned home late on the Friday evening, and perceiving the possible importance of the communication mentioned in Mrs. Merton's note to Mr. Hylton, resolved to set off with the letter itself, at an early hour on the Saturday morning, to the parsonage at Milverstoke. He had left the letter with Mrs. Hylton, finding the errand on which Mr. Hylton had gone to London, whom he heartily wished God-speed; and moreover, relieved the good lady's anxieties concerning her husband's duty on the morrow, by pledging himself either personally to occupy the pulpit and reading-desk at Milverstoke church, or provide some one who would; which done, he returned home; and, it may be as well to say, that he proved able to perform his promise. A crowded and very attentive congregation heard both the morning and afternoon service; their prayers being desired for one appointed to die, and for others dangerously ill and greatly distressed in mind. Most, if not all of those present, thought only of the condemned criminal, his

sick wife, and troubled father ; but others bethought themselves also of Lady Alkmond, lying dangerously ill, and piously included her in their prayers. Neither the Earl nor Lady Emily made their appearance at the church. There had been a kind of gloomy excitement throughout the village and neighbourhood during the Saturday and Sunday ; rising high on its being discovered that Mr. Hylton had suddenly gone up to London, on behalf of Ayliffe—being supposed to have very sufficient reasons for so doing. When, however, good Mrs. Hylton, in the fulness of her feeling heart, let out to Mrs. Wigley, the churchwarden's wife (who told it to her husband, and he to the doctor and surveyor, and they to many others), the purport of the mysterious letter from Mrs. Merton, the public feeling quickly rose to a pitch of painful intensity. But when, above all, news came down on the Sunday night, by the coach which had passed through the county town that a respite or reprieve had actually arrived, the feelings which it excited cannot be described. In spite of black appearances, Ayliffe's high character had proved, for a long time, like a buckler against reproach and suspicion, till the trial ; when the reported stern concurrence of the Lord Chief Justice with the verdict of the jury, staggered the strongest friend of the convicted. Now, however, that a reprieve had arrived—

which was imagined to have emanated directly from His Majesty, as a personal act—the tide was entirely turned in Ayliffe's favour, and good Mr. Hylton given credit for a very potent influence over the will and pleasure of Majesty. Hence the excitement which had attended his return—an excitement which would have manifested itself in a less subdued manner, but for a consideration of the peculiar and painful position of the Earl of Milverstoke, who owned at least two-thirds of the property in the village. The following is an exact copy of the letter which had, almost alone, wrung the respite from the hesitating Chief Justice of England :—

Dunkirk, 15th March.

“Reverend Mr. Merton,

“Being at this present here, Sir, at which place a man of which I had been comrade in another coaster, of which I am no longer on board, but in another vessel that I am mate of, and the reason of this trouble to you, Sir (which have doubtless forgot Jack Jevous, whose mother you knew in Midgecombe), is my seeing the County Paper which he show'd me on Sunday last, where is describ'd the horrid murder of Lord Alkmond by somebody caught, but, Reverend Sir, perhaps others had hands in it, as this may show and my log-book too

which I writ it in at the time, that is that as our boat was rowing back from the shore to the ship, this last was about two miles off, in a line with Milverstone Castle (S.S.E.) on the exact same night of that murder, and the man (his name is Jno. Harrup) heard gun-fire in the wood once or twice near the Castle, and just then saw one or (may be) two men running like for life along the shore to the east, thinking them running away only from sport, because catch'd in the woods, and poaching. Jno. Harrup only 4 or 5 hundred yards from the shore, which I entered in my log all on that day and Harrup is still here, only we are going up further than this before we return, which will be very soon, and God send us good trading in these quarters, and best respects (and hope of forgiving this trouble) from Rev. Sir, yrs' mo. dutifully; and to command; (the name of this vessel is the *Morning Star*). J. Jevons. (Putting up in London at Wapping, at the *Commodore Anson*.)"

Addressed—"The Rev. Mr. Merton, Rector of the Parish, Midgecombe."

After perusing and re-perusing this quaint but—in Mr. Hylton's estimation—all-important document, the suspicion hinted at by the Chief Justice that it might be only some cunning device to mislead justice, flick-

ered with cruel frequency around Mr. Hylton's mind. Yet there seemed an authentic air about the letter ; and Mr. Merton had assured Mrs. Hylton that he distinctly recollected a young man called Jack Jevons living at Midgecombe about seven or eight years before, but of whom he knew little except that he was the son of a worthy widow (a parishioner of Mr. Merton's) since dead, and had run off to sea, to her great displeasure ; but Mr. Merton had never heard of anything to the disadvantage of Jevons ; and, since receiving the letter, had through inquiries made by one of his servants, heard that Jevons was mate of some coasting vessel. However this might be, Mr. Hylton's first business was to make an exact transcript of this letter, and then, in performance of his promise, he enclosed the original to the Lord Chief Justice, putting his packet with his own hand, and in the presence of a witness, into the post-office. He also sent by a special messenger a note addressed to Mr. Melcombe, a very active and experienced attorney, in a neighbouring town, requesting his attendance at the parsonage at an early hour in the ensuing morning, on a matter of importance ; which consisted, in fact, of the energetic prosecution of inquiries concerning the writer of the above letter, and whether or not he had returned to England, or if not, where the ship might now be, and whether

and how it could be discovered. If Ayliffe's earthly salvation depended on the issue of these inquiries, and within the time already limited, how awfully precarious his fate!

Having had some trifling repose during the afternoon, and partaken of a spare dinner, Mr. Hylton ordered his horse to the door; and having made another copy of the letter on which so much depended, he carefully placed it in his pocket-book, and set off, in a pious, firm, and solemn spirit, for Milverstoke Castle, which he reached about seven o'clock. As usual, when he went unattended, he turned off into a by-path which led at a few hundred yards' distance from the Castle towards the stables; and there dismounting gave his horse into the care of a groom, who, hastily transferring his charge to another, ran off at top speed in an opposite direction, while Mr. Hylton slowly made his way back into the main path which led to the front of the Castle. He walked very slowly and thoughtfully along; but on reaching the door by which he usually entered, he was spared the trouble of announcing his arrival, by a servant who was stationed there, holding the door half open. He raised his finger towards his lips, and then said in a very low tone, "The Lady Emily, Sir, has given orders that when you arrived you should be conducted into a

chamber, for a short time, near her Ladyship's apartment, where her Ladyship will speedily come to you."

"Tell her Ladyship," said Mr. Hylton, with some surprise, "that I will await her arrival in any room she pleases, but that I earnestly request her Ladyship to come quickly, for I am here on business of importance with his Lordship, and by appointment."

He had not sat down more than three or four minutes, and was looking at his watch with fast increasing anxiety, when the door was opened quickly but silently, and the dark and slight but graceful figure of Lady Emily entered and advanced to him, extending both her hands, which were very cold as he clasped them, and her face was deadly pale.

"Dear Mr. Hylton, I hear that my papa has sent for you—what is it about?" she inquired with eager apprehension.

"I really *know* not, dearest Lady Emily; his Lordship did not say in his brief note why he wished to see me. Pray, did he expect me sooner?"

She looked down for a moment, and after a hesitating pause said, "I believe he did, and was dreadfully angry, I hear, at your not coming earlier."

"Have you seen his Lordship to-day?"

"Only for a moment, early in the morning,—but he did not see me; and I never recollect him looking so

much agitated. Do you know a Captain Plumridge, or some such name, a dragoon officer at the barracks? He was here on Friday night till very late, I am told. Dear Mr. Hylton, what did he come about?" said Lady Emily very anxiously.

"I cannot say that I do not know; but he came of his own free will to ask his Lordship a question, and I certainly knew that he was coming."

"Was it"—she trembled visibly—"was it to save the life of—you know—Mr. Hylton—whom I mean?" continued the agitated girl.

"No, Lady Emily."

A sudden piercing glance of her lustrous eyes fell upon him with an expression which he could not at the moment fully understand. He saw her bosom heave a very heavy sigh.

"Dear Mr. Hylton, you know how I love you, and would believe you against all the world," said she, seizing his hand with convulsive earnestness. "Do you think he ought not to die? Do you think he is innocent?"

"In the most solemn manner, I assure you that I feel as certain of his innocence, as that the sun rose this morning!"

Her bright eyes were fixed upon him as he spoke with a mournful intensity; her bosom heaved fast, in silence, for some moments.

“Then,” she said, in a tremulous whisper, “you will never get my papa to believe it! No, not if you were an angel out of heaven, coming down before his very eyes from the clouds, to tell him so!”

“Why, my dearest Lady Emily, why say you so?” inquired Mr. Hylton with great earnestness.

“Oh, I *know* it!” she replied, shaking her head: “and I am very, very unhappy after what you have just said; and so will be somebody else, when I tell her”—

“Dear, dear Lady Emily,” said Mr. Hylton, with great earnestness, “I know whom you mean! And does *she* forgive”—

“Yes, she does! though she knows not whether he be guilty or not of this horrid crime. She has prayed to God, so have I, and though he be guilty we both forgive him, and do not wish him to die. And if he be *innocent*! Oh, Mr. Hylton! *Then* to die! And *my papa* to wish it!”

The low, thrilling voice in which she said this produced an indescribable effect on Mr. Hylton.

“You know what a dreadful day we must have looked forward to in this”—she shuddered—“and when we heard last night that it was *not* to occur”—

“My dear Lady Emily,” whispered Mr. Hylton, “I have no time to explain details; but I must tell you that since the trial, a fact has come to light tending

strongly to show some other hand engaged in this awful business than that of poor Ayliffe! The finger of Providence seems to have pointed out some traces, which with the blessing of God may lead to"—

"Who is that? who is that?" inquired the terrified girl, hastily rising from her chair, and opening the door.

It was her maid, who hurriedly whispered that she had just heard that his Lordship had ordered horses to be got ready to go instantly to the parsonage.

"I must leave you; you must go to papa directly!" said she, with a face full of alarm.

"I will, dear Lady Emily"—

"And oh, consider his feelings!"—her eyes filled suddenly with tears.

"I do! I will! my heart bleeds for him! I fear he will be dreadfully angry with me for what I have done."

"I fear he will!" sighed Lady Emily; "but—think of *us* when you are with him! and don't for worlds—do not for worlds—let him know that I have been with you!" Then she hastily took from her bosom a small black-edged packet, and put it into Mr. Hylton's hands: "You will know what to do with this," said she earnestly: (it afterwards proved to be a £10 bank-note). Another moment and she was hastening along, followed by her maid, to Lady Alkmond's chamber; and Mr. Hylton proceeded

round to the front door, and, ringing the bell, was quickly admitted, and walked with firm step and yet firmer heart, led by one of those who had ushered Captain Lutteridge into the Earl's presence, and who, now opening the library-door, announced Mr. Hylton, and, on his entry, instantly withdrew.

"So, Sir," said Lord Milverstoke in a low hoarse voice, rising from his chair, his eyes flashing the moment that he saw Mr. Hylton, "you have robbed the gibbet of its due to-day!" Mr. Hylton slowly approached, with a respectful inclination, towards a chair which seemed to have been placed for him, but spoke not, observing the fearful excitement under which the Earl was labouring: "I say, Sir, you have robbed the gallows this day! you have made groans rise from the grave of the murdered!" said the Earl, with a vehemence of manner to which Mr. Hylton had never seen or imagined an approach.

"I hope not, my Lord," he commenced gravely.

"I say you have, Sir! The dead in their graves are crying out against you!"

"God forbid, my Lord! Nay, God forbid!" repeated Mr. Hylton.

"Blood crieth out from the ground!—And you have dared to interfere to defeat the vengeance of Heaven!—Presumptuous!"

“You are labouring, my Lord, under great excitement; let me implore of you to endeavour to calm yourself, and I will respectfully and readily answer to anything which your Lordship may demand. Recollect, my Lord, that I have come willingly to attend your Lordship”—

“What have you been doing, Sir? You, having a sacred duty to me and my family, being at present one of my chaplains, Sir, have bestirred yourself—have busied yourself—have gone about—to save the life of the guilty—of him who did his endeavours to blast me and my house—him whose accursed body was forbidden to pollute the grave! Yes, Sir, such was the voice of the laws of your country! such the voice of justice! and you—*you* forsooth!—have dared to step forward and disobey and defeat that law, and pervert that justice! What, Sir!” the Earl started forward a step or two nearer to Mr. Hylton, who moved not, “would you have that blood-stained monster let loose upon *me*?—Am I—are I and mine—henceforth to skulk in terror from the light of day for fear of the assassin? Oh! hideous!—You ingrate! you meddling priest!—There stand you, calm before my madness! madness which you are bringing upon me!—which I feel coming upon me—and all at the bidding of one who was bound religiously to me and mine!” The

Earl stepped back and threw himself down on the couch; the veins of his forehead were swollen; he shook perceptibly, and uttered a groan that seemed rending open his breast, while his eyes were fixed upon those of Mr. Hylton, who stood in an attitude of respectful firmness. "Why speak you not, Sir? Have you then no defence?—no excuse? Do you stand there and defy me?"

"Oh no, my Lord! no! I take God to witness how my soul is torn at beholding you; fearful as is your language to be heard by a Christian, and a Christian minister"—

"Bah! talk not, Sir, to *me* of your Christian character!" thundered the Earl.

"Your Lordship means not to insult or outrage my sacred office; too well I know your Lordship's lofty character. When you are calmer, you possess a soul loving justice; to that soul I appeal; for that calmness I wait; I will then render full account of everything, even the smallest matter that I have done"—

"Now, Sir! now! the present moment! You shall have no pretence, Sir, for contriving evasive answers, or cunning subterfuges! Sir, there is a seat beside you! Mr. Hylton—I request you—I beg you to be seated—begin! begin, Sir!—I am calmer—I am calmer than I was—calm I never shall be again—my soul is

shaken by your misconduct — your cruelty — your perfidy !”

“If, my Lord, you desire me, as calmly as I may, to give an account of my doings, I will at once”—

“Well, Sir!—at last, then!—but remember, Sir, two things I want!—explain *the past*! forbear *for the future*! to those two, Sir, address your words!”

“Have I, then, my Lord, really free speech? Hear me first, my Lord, and afterwards, if you choose, dismiss me hence as you will, with whatever indignity, with whatever reproach!”

“Oh! I am all ear, Sir! all attention!” exclaimed Lord Milverstoke, with an exhausted look, his eyes fixed heavily on those of Mr. Hylton, who, with a composed presence of mind which had never for a moment deserted him, inclined towards Lord Milverstoke with a countenance full of respect and sympathy, believing now that the fearful storm had spent its chief violence.

“Having leave, my Lord,” he began with quiet deliberation, “from one who never once broke his word, that I know of, and who, I verily believe, from his high nature, cannot, I will speak as becomes one man to another, in the presence of Him who made us both, and orders every event that ever happened or can happen, however mysterious and awful, His nature being such. I will speak as though I might

never again speak here, nor enter this Castle. I acknowledge the duty I owe your Lordship, one that, humble and imperfect as may be my mode of doing it, I would earnestly desire to do, to the end of my days,—or to the end of your Lordship's will and pleasure. It was I that buried your dead out of your sight, my Lord, and in that awful moment was so moved by your majestic sorrow, that I scarce could perform my sacred functions." Lord Milverstoke's eyes fell to the ground for a moment, and his lips quivered, but manifestly with no intention to speak, and Mr. Hylton's voice slightly trembled: "When you quitted that burial-place, these eyes followed you, and I breathed an humble prayer to Almighty God, that He who had broken would heal your heart—a prayer that has seldom since been absent from me, or forgotten when I offered up my own supplications. My Lord, this most cruel, this barbarous and most bloody murder, is hideous at this moment in my eyes as in your Lordship's: the vengeance of Heaven, of Him to whom vengeance belongs, will assuredly light upon the head of him who did this deed, be it sooner, be it later, than man may look for; and I pray God that such vengeance, if it be His will, may be swift. Now crave I your Lordship's most absolute word and promise to be performed, while I say but little more.

I know not when I knowingly broke my own word, or spoke that which I knew to be false ; and so I now tell your Lordship firmly, even though a thousand torturing racks were stretched in readiness before me, I believe in my soul, in my soul of souls, that this wretched man, Adam Aycliffe, is innocent of this deed." Lord Milverstoke started from his chair, his breast heaving suddenly and violently, and he walked to and fro for a few moments in silence, while Mr. Hylton proceeded : —“ I believe that had he been able, and had had the opportunity, his giant strength would have slain a thousand who had raised a hand against the precious life of your son ; ay, or of any one else.”

“ Oh ! insupportable !—intolerable !” vehemently muttered the Earl through his closed teeth, as he paced to and fro before Mr. Hylton, looking, however, away from him, as if resolved not to interrupt him.

“ I deliberately acknowledge, however, that, as the case was proved at the trial on Friday last, no other verdict than Guilty would have been just.”

“ Oh ! what candour !” muttered the Earl to himself, with a kind of bitter fury.

“ So said, as doubtless your Lordship has heard, the Chief Justice of England ; so said the jury ; so said all who heard : there, had it stood, I would, had I been so required, have done mine office towards the dying

guilty, nor dared to meddle with his righteous doom. My Lord, these eyes saw, these ears heard, that wretched convict, when first he was thrust, manacled and fettered, and blighted by the curse of his sentence, into the cell where he awaited, and, I fear me, still awaits, an ignominious and unrighteous death. In that most terrible hour, believing himself thenceforth utterly beyond the help of man, did he most solemnly avow himself innocent. I believed him then, and have ever since; and I believe him *now*."

"How long—how much longer all this drivel?" quoth the Earl, as if nearly bursting through all self-control.

"But not on my mere belief, nor any man's mere belief, could that verdict be shaken. Yet have I gained, with efforts which nought could have induced me to make but a conviction that I obeyed the will of God, a brief and precious respite for this wretch. I have striven—I have been in long and mental struggle with the stern and just Chief Justice, and laid such cause before him as did force his righteous mind to delay this death. And for the grounds—the reasons—these am I ready to lay before your Lordship, if so your Lordship pleases." Mr. Hylton paused, and bowed.

"Ho, then at length my lips are loosed!—is it—even—so?" said the Earl. "And I may speak? and

am able to speak, not being choked with all the drivel that I have been hearing, and I hope, for your sake, Sir, that you have forgotten! So the idiot chatter of the convict-cell—but”—the Earl with a great effort restrained himself—“but state, Sir, such reasons, such grounds, as you have urged—state, I say, your pretences—false I know them!—Sir, Sir, I ask your forgiveness! Language unjustifiable and unbecoming has passed from these lips—I crave forgiveness, Sir! Scarce know I sometimes what I say or think. But, Sir, in mercy to me, tell me briefly why—why the law falters about this death, and so stultifies its most solemn doings in so few days, before all mankind?”

“My Lord, such reasons as I alleged satisfied a reluctant Judge; but only so far as to grant delay. No glimpse of mercy—of pardon—was there in his gloomy face; but this brief delay he granted for inquiry.”

Here Mr. Hylton produced the copy he had made of the letter which he had forwarded that day to London, and explained briefly how and when he himself had received it. Then he read it to the Earl with deliberate emphasis, observing his Lordship give a slight start when the running of the two men along the shore was mentioned; but he seemed instantly to recover himself, and heard Mr. Hylton read, without

interrupting him, to the end. Then Mr. Hylton observed, on quickly glancing at the Earl, an expression of withering scorn flit instantaneously over his agitated features.

“And that wretched scrawl has delayed this day’s justice, and satisfied the powerful mind of the Chief Justice! Sir, I tell you he must be a dotard! He should be removed! He deserves impeachment! I will in my place in Parliament impeach him!”

“Sees then, really, your Lordship nothing in all this?—no reason even for pausing—for considering whether it may not be possible to trace out the guilty and save the innocent? Oh, my Lord, not one single fortnight before the tree be felled, which, once felled, must lie for ever as it falls!”

“Who sees not, Sir, that this your letter is a transparent device—a forgery—an imposture—a practice upon your credulity? And are keys such as these henceforth to open our prison-doors? Oh, horrible, horrible mockery!”

“The writer, my Lord, is known—known to one whom your Lordship knows—the Rector of Midgecombe—a gentleman, surely, and of honour and veracity.”

“Oh, how can I patiently hear you, Mr. Hylton,”—said the Earl, reproachfully, and with infinitely greater

calmness than he had till then manifested, “ seriously urging on me such despicable drivelling—for *is* it not such? Will that paper of yours bear an instant’s scrutiny? And is it to be the potent instrument of letting loose again on society—oh, I shudder! I sicken! Why, Sir, how long is justice to be thus befooled? How long must we wait till these persons—Sir, the mere stating of it shows the monstrous absurdity of your proceedings. Your feelings pervert your judgment and disturb your understanding, Sir. A false pity makes you credulous and cruel: credulous are you to the guilty: cruel are you to the living—cruel to the memory of the dead!”

“ No, my Lord! The dead may be in spirit present with us at this moment—hearing and seeing, or *knowing* how the truth is—oh, my Lord, my Lord!”—Mr. Hylton said all this very solemnly, and saw that the Earl was for a moment startled by the thought which had been suggested to him. “ And beware, my Lord, lest you yourself be credulous of guilt where guilt is not. Is it not worse than being credulous of innocence where innocence is not, but guilt? This last is an error reparable; the other, irreparable; and an account thereof must be given hereafter. I speak with the liberty and authority of my office. I come not unbidden before you; I intrude

not on the retirement of grief. But you call me hither; and, as a messenger from my Heavenly Master, I stand before you, and plead against this your precipitate judgment of your fellow-man. ‘If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand?’ To Him all things are known, even our most secret sins; quite forgotten, it may be, by ourselves, unknown to any living; but marked and remembered by Him! all seen by the unsleeping Eye!”

The Earl remained silent; his face suddenly went of a ghastly whiteness.

Mr. Hylton proceeded:—“Awful is this visitation of His Providence—like a thunderbolt hath it fallen on your Lordship. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God! Think not of vengeance, which is His, and He will repay it! How know you His object in all this? or the cause of it? That there is some deep mystery hanging over this fearful occurrence, I in my conscience do believe. It may be one never to be solved on this side of the grave,” proceeded Mr. Hylton, who *felt* that his words were sinking into the heart of the listener. “I have myself reason to suspect—perhaps to fear—that something strange and solemn may yet come forth from all this; yet to me all is now darkness. My Lord, I ask your pardon, I did not hear what your Lordship said,” continued Mr.

Hylton, observing that the Earl asked him some question.

"I know not, Sir," said he in a low subdued tone of voice, and a strange apprehensive expression of countenance, "what you wish to convey to me. What do you mean, Sir? What are you alluding to?"

He paused, and Mr. Hylton remained silent, from several considerations.

"Did you, Sir," said, presently, the Earl, "send Captain Lutteridge to me as an emissary to torment me, and"—he stopped, evidently suffering under strong emotion.

"My Lord, I did not send Captain Lutteridge hither; he proposed it himself: he refused from a scruple of honour to disclose some matter which yet he said had happened, or, if I understood aright, something that had been said at your Lordship's banqueting-table before"—

"Have you seen him, Sir, since your return?" said the Earl faintly.

"I have, my Lord."

"And what said he?"

"That he had seen your Lordship; and he simply refused to give me any information whatever, or to give me any cause for his withholding it."

The Earl sighed heavily. "And, tell me, Sir, did

you found on anything that had fallen from him, any plea urged before the Chief Justice?" said the Earl eyeing Mr. Hylton with gloomy intensity.

"My Lord, I was forced to quit Milverstoke"—

"I know, I know that, Sir. But give me an answer! Give me, Sir, an answer to my question!—candid and true, I know from your character, that such answer will be."

"I repeat, my Lord, that time pressed upon me, I may say, mortally. I saw the Captain but for a short time; he refused to tell me aught that had passed at your Lordship's table without your Lordship's most explicit permission, which he said he would get refused or granted before I quitted for London; but, to my infinite concern, the coach came before him, and I quitted by it, or my mission had been useless. Under these difficulties, my Lord,"—The Earl listened with agonising earnestness. "I did most undoubtedly say to my Lord Chief Justice solely this, that I might possibly be able hereafter to show him some reasons for the Lord Alkmond's having quitted the banqueting-table, to go into the wood as he did; but I mentioned not names nor places, least of all those of your Lordship; and not naming them, neither did I in any way suggest or insinuate them."

The Earl eyed him all the while that he was saying

this gloomily. "Do you believe Lord Milverstoke, Mr. Hylton, when he affirms anything?"

"Most absolutely, as I would that me your Lordship would so believe."

"Then, Sir, I tell you that I verily believe it to be out of all question, that the brief conversation which Captain Lutteridge represents as having taken place at my table had any connection whatsoever with the frightful occurrence which has reduced me to—that which you see before you. Yet, Sir, would I not have such matters talked of, giving occasion, as possibly they might, to vulgar scandal and gossip, and offensive and hurtful speculation and wondering. But, Sir, is it possible that the Chief Justice laid stress on such matter; and founded upon it, in any degree, his respite?"

"I know not, my Lord, for he said not; he told me, with a face that, ever since, I have seen frowning before me, that he was all against me! and that, in a manner, I took the proffered respite at my peril—on peril, that is, of making the prisoner twice die."

"Think not, Sir, from what I have said in this matter, that I consent to this foolish respite; I think it a foul perversion of justice, and of most horrid example."

"I was hoping, my Lord, that milder and better thoughts were rising up in your mind!"

"Draw not false consequences, Sir, from appearances. Methinks I seem calmer than when we met; but, believe me, Sir, my heart seems dead within me; my mind may follow at any instant. I feel my soul failing me. Things that you know not, revived by what you have been saying, are well-nigh maddening me; I can now no longer think or talk. Leave me, Mr. Hylton; but be assured, my will is inflexible, my judgment unconvinced—utterly untouched by anything that you have urged."

"Still would I ask your Lordship to listen to the other ground on which I pressed my precarious suit with the Chief Justice. My Lord, I have reason to believe that—without desiring to impute anything of wilful misconduct to one of the principal witnesses, he was seriously mistaken, at least, in attributing to the prisoner that which he has ever strenuously disclaimed—ill blood to your Lordship, or any member of your family. That witness stated that this unhappy man, and even his father, had long entertained malignant feelings towards your Lordship."

"So they have, Sir! I know it!" interrupted the Earl, fiercely: "but why am I to be dragged into these

matters? Am I to sit in judgment on every paltry perversion of proved facts, subsequently thought of by the condemned and his friends? No more of it, Sir! No more of it, Sir! I will hear nothing: blood glares before my eyes! the cry of it is in my ears! Leave me! leave me, Sir! and pursue, if you will, your insane efforts to cheat the gallows finally of its prey!—to bring again to Milverstoke your injured your pious, parishioner! Oh!—it is maddening!—Sir, I would be alone!”

“I take my leave then, my Lord, thus laden with your bitter, but I feel unjust, reproaches: my conscience being clear and void of offence to God and man, and dictating my duty; that duty I must and will do, my Lord, caring for consequences nothing whatever.”

“Good even, Sir, good even!” interrupted the Earl impetuously, and with a miserable countenance; and, bowing in silence, Mr. Hylton withdrew, greatly oppressed; inwardly bewailing the Earl’s sufferings, but more his unchristian temper; desponding for the issue of his own enterprise of mercy and justice; but with no trace of exasperation or irritation for the many harsh expressions and imputations which had been levelled at him by the proud, infuriate peer.

That night slept good Mr. Hylton in deep, sweet sleep, forgetful of all things—alike of bodily fatigue,

of mental anxiety, and the bitter, impassioned reproaches to which he had listened with manly and Christian forbearance just before retiring to rest. Not him disturbed they sleeping, as, when awake, they had not provoked him to forgetfulness of whose Minister and servant he was; whose work he had to do; whom he had hereafter to appear before, and show how that work had been done!

It cannot be exactly told how it came to pass, but there seemed a sort of tacit understanding that evening among the leading inhabitants of Milverstoke, that they should confer together on the matter of the Respite; and one by one they dropped into the parlour (a large, yet snug and simple-fashioned one it was) of the Blind Hound—for so had the inn at Milverstoke been immemorially called, owing to an ancient tradition in the Milverstoke family. While Mr. Hylton was engaged in his exciting interview with the gloomy lord of the Castle, the parlour of the Blind Hound was well nigh filled. The doctor had felt it his duty to call upon the churchwarden, Mr. Wigley, a man whom he had most thoroughly cured at least a fortnight before, and who being, somewhat, it might, be imprudently, at the Blind Hound, thither vigilantly followed him the doctor; and they two were incontinently joined by at least six or eight others.

“ There’s no getting over the blood on coat and stick—there ought n’t to be, and therefore there can’t, and so there’s the end of all *that*, Mr. Wigley,” said Mr. Glynders, the farrier, whose professional services were often required at the Castle.

“ Well, *nay* now,” say I ; “ nay, saving your better knowledge, Mr. Glynders,” quoth Mr. Wigley—a most devoted admirer of the parson’s—“ why may it not be true, as the poor man said at the trial, that he did stumble in fright over a body that had been murdered by another ? ”

“ Pho ! so would get off every murderer,” replied Mr. Glynders haughtily. “ I stand on my Lord Chief Justice, and he said ’t was all gammon, and quite impossible to be true ; and he were right ! ”

“ Why,” said Mr. Muddle, a small farmer, “ saving your presence, Mr. Glynders, I do remember something that, if you please, I will mention :—Do you, gentlemen, any of you remember when Nick Gould did have me up at Sessions, two years ago, for assault : he showed the Justices a shirt of his with blood on the neck and wrist, and swore I did it with my fist, when nobody else was by—he was believed, and I fined. I knowing all the while it was a cruel and false lie and perjury ; for I fetched no blood, striking him only on the shoulder, and kicking him elsewhere

(as I would again, were he to do what he did); how-s'ever, I paid the money, and be hanged to him; and three months afterwards, over his cups one night, he owned the blood was that of a pig he'd killed the same time."

"Now why can't it be so here, Mr. Glynders?" said Mr. Wigley, replenishing his pipe:—"answer that."

"Because it *can't*—that's flat," replied Glynders dogmatically.

"Alas! Mr. Wigley," said the doctor, "though I'm a bit shaken about this case, I don't see how that matter of Mr. Muddle concerns this—seeing there it was merely pig's blood, and none of man at all; but whereas here, 'tis owned by Ayliffe to be the very blood of poor Lord Alkmond past all dispute; so there's no likeness between the two cases."

"Yes, to be sure, that is so; and what I was going to say, Doctor," said Mr. Glynders. "So now you've had your say, Muddle; and a pretty one 'tis!"

Mr. Muddle modestly smoked in silence, inwardly owning that he was quite vanquished, but not very distinctly seeing how that been effected by Mr. Glynders. Here there was a pause.

"I wonder," said the doctor, "what any one of us would have done had we been in Ayliffe's place—

gone to do as he said he did—and, stick in hand, lit on the bloody body ? ”

“ I should have tried to revive him, or see if he were really dead.”

“ I should have hollowed out Murder.”

“ So should I.”

“ I should have shouted, and run for help.”

“ I should have listened for steps,” said several in a breath.

“ And suppose,” said Mr. Wigley, “ you’d heard some one coming after you while you were running, and had suddenly thought how ugly and black it might seem against you—adad, if I’d thought of all that, I’m thinking I should have done as Ayliffe did, and be glad enough to get clean out on’t.”

“ And a stick, with blood on it, in your hand, too, would be a nice companion to get home and be caught with,” quoth Glynders.

“ Nay, nay, you’r too hard on poor Ayliffe,” said one.

“ Suppose he’d thrown the stick away, and it had been found bloody ; would n’t that have been worse ? ”

No one answered this, for it seemed so convincing, till Mr. Muddle modestly said, “ No ; why, it might be said some one else had done it with Ayliffe’s stick ? ”

Here was another pause : whereupon, “ You see,

gentlemen, how wrong you all get when once you go beyond my Lord Chief Justice and the jury. Depend on't they're always right, or it's no use having judge and jury."

"That which troubles me most in the business," said the doctor, "is what all this has brought on poor old Ayliffe and young Mrs. Ayliffe: better people never lived in this country, that ever I heard of; and as for the old man, he's brought up his family past most of us."

"Well, no one says *he's* done anything wrong, and much is he to be pitied," said Mr. Glynders; "yet 't is proved he had a terrible grudge against my Lord and *his*."

"What!" said Mr. Wigley, "old Adam Ayliffe!—my life on't, 't is false!" And all present but Glynders eagerly echoed his words. "Never hurt did Ayliffe to any man, woman, child, beast, bird, or any living thing."

"By the way, Sir," interposed Mr. Wigley, addressing the doctor, "how comes on poor Mrs. Ayliffe—is she likely to get over it?"

"No, I fear not; the labour that she was in, from the sudden fright, brought her direct to the grave's edge, and there she has been ever since: a single puff may blow her in, as it were!"

“ So be it with the Lady Alkmond at the Castle, as I surely hear,” said Mr. Glynders, somewhat sternly. “ What can signify Adam Ayliffe’s wife to that poor Lady ? ”

“ Make not comparisons, Mr. Glynders, I beseech you ! ” said the doctor—who had been himself occasionally in attendance on Lady Alkmond, in addition to two physicians, one of them of great eminence from London, and another from the neighbouring town, and the resident family physician. “ Surely God hath afflicted both, and the one is as innocent, and as much to be pitied, sure, as the other.”

“ What ! where the one’s husband—bless the poor Lady—died unjustly, and the other’s will die justly ? ”

Here was a pause.

“ I wonder what my Lord Milverstoke says to all this ! ” exclaimed one ; and added, addressing Mr. Glynders, “ What say you, Mr. Glynders—we should like to hear ? ”

“ I never mention what happens at the Castle,” he replied, very impressively. “ But thus much I may say—his Lordship desires only the thing that is right to be done ; which is, that this man, Ayliffe, should suffer ! ”

“ ’T is a dreadful thing to hear oneself told, with one’s own ear, that one’s body’s to be dissected and

anatomised!" said one; and there was a perceptible shudder throughout the room.

"I hope it won't come to that," said the doctor mildly; "but if the thing *is* to be, why, I must say,"—he paused suddenly, and added, in a different voice—"it surely does not signify much—does it?—what is to become of the shell, if the kernel's safe: and I think I know," he continued, dropping his voice to a lower tone, "those who will have the anatomising of poor Ayliffe! for what *must* be, must be, and there's no use mincing things, is there?" he asked, looking round with a melancholy shake of the head; but every face looked blank; no one answered; for before the disturbed mind's eye of each, arose the dismal object of a skeleton—the skeleton of one whom all of them had familiarly known for years as a man frank, good-natured, high-spirited, ready to oblige everybody, of spotless character till this questionable charge, and who, while they were talking, lay, as it were, alive in death—his manly limbs heavily ironed, his heart broken.

"There's a deal of work to be done this next few days by those who have got this respite, is n't there?" said one.

"It will all come to nothing, you'll see, this that was heard of, about a man seen running away. I sup-

pose it's that which gained the respite; but those must be sharp who have the catching of that same man during the fortnight. I should like to know what said the King on the subject, when Mr. Hylton saw his Majesty?"

"*He* never saw the King—not he," said Mr. Glynders, somewhat sneeringly.

"*Did n't he!*" echoed Mr. Wigley confidently, and somewhat peremptorily; for he being churchwarden, and in frequent communication with Mr. Hylton on parish business, and indeed on many other matters, felt that he had a right to appear better informed than others, of his movements; and the grander they appeared, the more elevating, of course, to Mr. Wigley. His significant "*Did n't he!*" seemed conclusive; and after some other conversation of a general nature, the party was about to break up, when the landlord announced that Mr. Hylton had just called, on horse-back, as he passed, to ask if Mr. Wigley were there; and on learning that he was, had ridden on, leaving word for him to come at once to the parsonage, as Mr. Hylton had something to say to him. Mr. Wigley looked important, yet changed colour a little; and all present silently gave him credit for being as high in the counsels of the Vicar, as he had been intimating. And, to be sure, very shortly afterwards,

Mr. Hylton, all fatigued and depressed in body and mind as he was, gave Mr. Wigley half an hour's audience, and then put him upon making many inquiries early in the ensuing day, into a point connected with the great murder case, which Mr. Wigley inwardly wondered had never before happened to occur to any of the very astute party at the Blind Hound. His ears also tingled a little at a chance-word falling from Mr. Hylton, which dissipated into thin air the notion of his having seen the King on the matter : but that, good Mr. Wigley perhaps justly deemed unnecessary to be again alluded to elsewhere : and besides, seeing the King's minister personally, was, after all, exceedingly like seeing the King himself.

CHAPTER V.

THE first thing that Mr. Hylton did in the morning was to attempt to follow up the inquiries suggested by the mysterious letter from the mate of the Morning Star: taking such means as occurred to him to ascertain whether any one living near the sea-shore had noticed anything unusual on the eventful night in question; or anything which, when originally observed, might have appeared unimportant, yet, when now minutely inquired into, might become of pregnant significance. Then his thoughts directed themselves, in his dire dilemma and perplexity, towards a question which he dared hardly even propose to himself:— Could any one have had any imaginable MOTIVE for killing Lord Alkmond? Scarcely venturing to follow up the shadowy possibility, yet led on irresistibly by the vague and mysterious character of what might have taken place at, or immediately after, the banquet on that fatal evening; he thought within himself, as he stood in his little library, ‘ Had the unfortunate young nobleman, in an unguarded and guilty hour,

yielded to headlong passions, and lit up in the hearts of others the fires of intense and unappeasable malignity and revenge? But, indeed, how could that degrading suspicion be entertained in the case of a young nobleman, situated as he was—more especially at that particular period—coming down at a season of exulting family festivity, accompanied by his beautiful Viscountess, and his cherished little son and heir? Had, nevertheless, for Mr. Hylton felt such an awful sense of responsibility upon him as compelled him to do with his might what his hand had undertaken to do—and to let no false delicacy, no improbability even, however glaring at first sight—prevent him from exhausting every possible supposition—‘had Lord Alkmond so far forgotten himself, in a moment of licentiousness, in a temporary God-forgetting recklessness, as to incur the blasting guilt of ruining female virtue, and turning into fiends some interested in protecting or avenging it? If not at, or near, Milverstoke, had such miserable occurrence happened elsewhere: and had the blood-thirsty avenger tracked his unsuspecting steps, and lain in wait for him? Why was Lord Alkmond at all in the woods at such an hour on such an occasion? Had he gone by appointment? or impelled by what some call fatality?’ Mr. Hylton almost started in trepidation, at the possibilities which he was con-

juring up around him—the fearful figures with which he was peopling his disturbed and morbidly active fancy. For that *something* had occurred, and of a very peculiar nature, was evident from what little had dropped from Captain Lutteridge and the Earl himself; the latter being—and, indeed, having owned himself—greatly distressed and agitated about the matter, and having peremptorily forbidden both Captain Lutteridge and Mr. Hylton to utter a syllable about it, to any one.

‘But let me not,’ suddenly said Mr. Hylton, almost aloud, ‘let me not wrong the noble and innocent dead, in order to protect even the wronged, and innocent, and mortally-endangered living! To the winds with such injurious and cruel suspicions!’ Yet, struggle as he might, he could not quit the dismally exciting train of thought into which he had seemed forced; and his speculations received a fresh impetus on its suddenly occurring to him, that he had heard of the young Lord’s having been for some time shortly previous to the fatal occurrence, in low and troubled spirits; and Captain Lutteridge had distinctly told him that whatever was the subject which had been introduced into the conversation, it had suddenly disturbed Lord Alkmond to a pitch that was absolutely intolerable, and he had been, apparently, incapaci-

tated from presenting himself, at least till after some intended interval for recovering his spirits, in the ball-room. Into the woods he had gone; and to a very considerable distance from the Castle; and long he could not have been absent, before being murdered by the hand of most frightfully ferocious violence. Had that blow been struck by the persons who were represented as having been seen running along the shore? And had they intended to slay Lord Alkmond? or had they mistaken him for some other person? If so, *for whom?* Had his Lordship unexpectedly encountered poachers, and, owing to his dress, in the gloom of the night, been confounded with some obnoxious keeper? Or had he, with the spirit of a soldier, endeavoured to resist and capture, and been suddenly felled to the earth by some one behind? Or—horrid thought, haunting Mr. Hylton in spite of all that had occurred in the condemned cell—had, as suggested by the Lord Chief Justice, the blow been really struck by Ayliffe, under the belief that he was inflicting it on Hundle, the perfidious informer against him? Or was it possible that Lord Alkmond had gone out into the wood by appointment?—a supposition that seemed to the last degree improbable. With whom? For what? And at such an hour, and on such an occasion? If Ayliffe had

gone into the wood in the way which he had represented, how knew he that Hundle would be there? And had Hundle been there that night? After being long tormented by these and many other perplexing conjectures, Mr. Hylton suddenly asked himself the question—whether, if, at the fortnight's end, the case stood as it did at that moment, he could then offer any valid reason whatever, why the sentence of the law should not be carried into effect? For what would there in such case be to extricate Ayliffe from the rational presumption arising out of his appalling proximity to the deed, in point of both time and place, as established to demonstration—but his own unsupported assertions? Would there be really doubt enough to warrant a further suspension of the sentence? He sighed, and inwardly answered in the negative. Had he, then, been guilty of precipitation? For surely very guilty would be such precipitation: and of that guilt all would convict him, however unjustly, by the adverse issue of his exertions. Alas! if he had nourished hopes but to be blighted! How heavy and thankless his responsibility! Accused on every side; by the prisoner, and all who pitied and wished him well; by Lord Milverstoke, and those interested in the prosecution; by the public, roused on behalf of justice!

Greatly disturbed was he by these doubts and

fears; yet he felt consoled by the conscious purity of his motives, his utter disinterestedness. Nay, was he not acting directly against his own worldly interests, in thus making a mortal enemy of the Earl of Milverstoke? This last, however, was a consideration which gave him not an instant's concern. And for the rest, he had from the first besought, and continued faithfully to seek, the aid of Heaven, and its guidance in all his doings; wherefore he felt a supporting consciousness of being engaged upon his duty, resolved to shrink from no suffering or sacrifice, whether foreseen or not; to leave no effort untried: *to work while it was day; for the night came in which no man might work.*

He felt an almost insuperable repugnance to visiting poor Ayliffe during the pendency of these critical proceedings. What questions might he not ask?—questions, the not answering of which might prove as fatally delusive, as the answering disingenuously; and as to equivocation of any sort, under any circumstances, it was a thing impossible to Mr. Hylton—least of all, as a minister of religion, and towards a death-doomed fellow-creature. And with reference to Mr. Hylton's present object, what useful information, as the case then stood, had he to expect from Ayliffe? There seemed but one subject on which Mr. Hylton could with any advantage question him: and

yet, when considered, how ineffectually, whatever might be the answer!—and that was, concerning the reason which Ayliffe had had for expecting to meet with Hundle in the wood, on the particular night when he went thither. But, as the case stood, what signified that reason, however satisfactory and conclusive? except, indeed, as tending to negative the notion that he had gone thither with any feelings of hostility towards Lord Alkmond, whom, nevertheless, he might have mistaken for the object of his own particular vengeance. But Mr. Hylton received one brief message from the unhappy occupant of the condemned cell which no man, least of all such an one as Mr. Hylton, could disregard:—"I go back into darkness while you are away!"

On this, 'Poor soul!' said Mr. Hylton, ordering his horse, 'I will quickly be with thee!'

As he rode along, his mind lost sight almost entirely of the temporal in the spiritual, the present in the future, interests of the condemned; and by the time that he had reached the gaol, his mind was in an elevated frame, befitting the solemn and sublime considerations with which it had been engaged.

A turnkey, with loaded blunderbuss on his arm, leaned against the cell door, which he opened for Mr. Hylton in silence, as he approached; disclosing poor

Ayliffe sitting on his bench, double-ironed, his head buried in his hands, his elbows supported by his knees. He did not move on the entrance of Mr. Hylton, as his name had not been mentioned by the turnkey.

“Adam! Adam!—the Lord be with you! Amen!” exclaimed Mr. Hylton, gently taking in his hand one of the prisoner’s.

Ayliffe suddenly started up, a gaunt figure, rattling in his irons, and grasping, in both his hands, that of Mr. Hylton, carried it to his heart, to which he pressed it for some moments in silence, and then, bursting into tears, sunk again on his bench.

“God bless you, Adam! and *lift up the light of His countenance upon you!* Put your trust in him: but remember that he is the All-Seeing, the Omniscient, Omnipotent God, *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity!*”

Ayliffe wept in silence, and with reverent affection of manner pressed to his lips the still-retained hand of Mr. Hylton.

“Come, Adam! speak! Speak to your pastor—your friend—your minister!”

“You seem an angel, Sir!” said Ayliffe, looking at him with a dull, oppressed eye, that was heart-breaking.

“Why an angel, Adam? I bring you,” said Mr.

Hylton, shaking his head, and sighing, “no earthly good news whatever; nothing but my unworthy offices to prepare you for hereafter! Prepare! prepare to meet thy God, for he draweth near! And who may abide the day of his coming!”

“I was readier for my change when last I saw you, Sir, than now,” said Ayliffe, with a suppressed groan, covering his face with his manacled hands.

“How is that, poor Adam?”

“Ah!—I was, so it seemed, half over Jordan, and have been dragged back. I see not now that other bright shore which made me forget earth! All now is dark!”

His words smote Mr. Hylton to the heart. “Why is this? Why should it be? Adam!” said he, very earnestly, “have you ever been, can you possibly ever be, out of God’s hands? What happens but from God? And if He hath prolonged this your bitter, bitter trial, what should you, what can you do, but submit to His infinite power and goodness? *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, to crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth! He will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies!*”

“Oh, Sir! oft do I think his mercy is clean gone for

ever! Why—why am I here?” he continued, with sudden vehemence. “He knoweth my innocence—yet will make me die the death of the guilty! That cannot, *cannot* be just!”

“Adam! Adam! Satan is indeed besieging you! Even if, in the inscrutable decrees of Providence, you be ordained to die for what you did not, have you forgotten that sublime and awful truth and fact on which hang all your hopes—the death of Him who died, *the just for the unjust?*”

Ayliffe’s head sunk down on his knees.

“Ah, Sir!” said he, tremulously, after a while, during which Mr. Hylton interfered not with his meditations, “these words do drive me into the dust, and then raise me again higher than I was before!”

“And so they ought, Adam. Is there a God? Has he really revealed himself? Are the Scriptures true? Am I the true servant of a true master? If to all this you say *yea*—speak not again distrustfully. If you do—if you so think—then are you too like to be beyond the pale of mercy. I am free, Adam,—you are bound,—yet are both our lives every instant at the command and absolute disposal of Him who gave them, that we might be on trial here for a little while. For aught I know, I may even yet die before you, and with greater pain and grief; but both of us

must die, and much of my life is gone for ever. As your frail fellow-mortal, then, I beseech you to listen to me! Our mode of leaving life is ordered by God, even as our mode of living in it. To some he hath ordained riches, others poverty; some pleasure, others misery, in this life; but all for reasons, and with objects best known, nay, known only to Himself! Adam, you have now been four days here beyond that which had been appointed you—now that we are alone, have you aught to confide to me, as the minister for whom you have sent? What saith my Master? If you confess your sins, he is faithful and just to forgive you; but if you say that you have no sin, you deceive yourself, and the truth is not in you. And if that last be so, Adam, what shall be said of you, what can be hoped for you?"

"If you be thinking of that deed for which I am condemned," said Ayliffe, with a suddenly radiant countenance, "then am I easy and happy. God, my maker, and who will be my judge, knoweth whether I speak the truth. Ay! ay! innocent am I of this deed as you!"

"It is right, Adam, that I should tell you that all mankind who know of your case, from the highest down even to the lowest, do believe you guilty."

"Ah, Sir, is not that hard to bear?" said Ayliffe,

with a grievous sigh, and a countenance that looked unutterable things.

“It is, Adam—it is hard; yet, were it harder, it must be borne. Here is Lord Milverstoke, who hath lost his son—his only son—the heir to his title and his vast possessions—lost him in this mysterious and horrid way: is not *that* hard to be borne? Have you, Adam,—I ask you by your precious hopes of hereafter,—animosity towards him, who believes you to be his son’s murderer?”

There was an awful silence for nearly a minute, at the close of which, Ayliffe, with an anguished face, said,

“Oh, Sir! give me time to answer you! Pray for me! I know whose example I ought to imitate; but”—he suddenly seemed to have sunk into a reverie, which lasted for some time; at the end of which,—“Sir—Mr. Hylton,” said he, desperately, “*am* I truly to die on Monday week? Oh, tell me! tell me, Sir! Life is sweet, I own!”

He sprung towards Mr. Hylton, and convulsively grasped his hands, looking into his face with phrenzied earnestness.

“I cannot—I will not deceive you, Adam,” replied Mr. Hylton, looking aside, and with a profound sigh. “My duty is to prepare you for death! But”—

“ Ah !” said he, with a desperate air, “ to be hanged like a vile dog !—and every one cursing me, who am all the while innocent !—and no Burial Service to be said over my poor body !—never—*never* to be buried !” With a dismal groan he sunk back, and would have fallen from the bench, but for Mr. Hylton’s stepping forward. “ Sir—Sir,” said Ayliffe presently, glaring with sudden wildness at Mr. Hylton, “ did you see the man at the door with the blunderbuss ? There he stands ! all day ! all night ! but never comes in !—never speaks !—Would that he would put it to my head and finish me in a moment !”

“ Adam ! Adam ! what awful language is this that I hear ?” said Mr. Hylton, sternly. “ Is this the way that you have spoken to your pious and venerable father ?”

“ No ! no ! no ! Sir !”—he pressed his hand to his forehead—“ but my poor head wanders ! I—I am better now ! I seem just to have come out of a dream. But never should I dream thus, if you would stay with me—till—all is over !”

Feeling it quite impossible to ask the miserable convict such questions as he had wished, Mr. Hylton resolved not to make the attempt, but to do it as prudently and as early as might be, through old Ayliffe, or the Chaplain or governor of the gaol. He was just

about to leave, and was considering in what terms he could the most effectually address himself to Ayliffe, when, without any summons having issued from within, the door was unlocked, and the turnkey, thrusting in his head, said,

“I say, my man, here’s the woman come with thy child, that thou’st been asking for. They’ll come in when the gentleman goes.”

Ayliffe started up from his seat with an eager motion towards the door, but was suddenly jerked down again, having forgotten in his momentary extacy that his irons were attached to a staple in the floor.

“Come, come, my man,” said the turnkey, sternly, “thou must be a bit quieter, I can tell thee, if this child is to come to thee.”

“Give me the lad! give me the lad! give me the lad!” said Ayliffe, in a hoarse whisper, his eyes straining towards the approaching figure of the good woman, who, with a very sorrowful and apprehensive look, now came in sight of the condemned man.

“Lord bless thee, Adam Ayliffe!” she began, bursting into tears, “Lord love thee and protect thee, Adam!”

“Give me the lad!—show me the lad!” he continued, gazing intently at her, while she tremblingly pushed aside her cloak, and, behold, there lay, simply

and decently clad, his little boy, awake, and gazing, apparently apprehensively, at the strange wild figure whose arms were extended to receive it."

"Adam, father of this thy dear child," said Mr. Hylton, interposing for a moment between Ayliffe and the child, not without some alarm, "wilt thou handle it tenderly, remembering how feeble and small it is?"

On this, poor Ayliffe gazed at Mr. Hylton with a face of unspeakable agony, weeping lamentably; and still extending his arms, the passive child, gazing at him in timid silence, was placed within them. He sat down gently, gazing at his child for some moments, with a face never to be forgotten by those who saw it. Then he brought it near to his face, and kissed incessantly, but with unspeakable tenderness, its tiny features, which were quickly bedewed with his tears.

"His mother!—his mother!—his mother!" he exclaimed, in heart-rending tones, still gazing intently at its face, which was directed towards his own with evident apprehension. Its little hand for a moment clasped one of the irons that bound its father, but removed it immediately, probably from the coldness of the metal. The father saw this, and seemed dreadfully agitated for some moments; and Mr. Hylton,

who also had observed the little circumstance, was greatly affected, and turned aside his head. After a while,

“How easily, my little lad, could I dash out thy brains against these irons,” said Ayliffe, in a low desperate tone of voice, staring into the child’s face, “and save thee from ever coming to this unjust fate that thy father hath!”

Mr. Hylton was excessively alarmed, but concealed his feelings, preparing, nevertheless, for some perilous and insane action endangering the safety of the child. The gathering cloud, however, passed away, and the manacled father kissed his unconscious child with all his former tenderness.

“They’ll tell thee, poor lad, that I was a murderer! though it be false as hell! They’ll shout after thee, There goes the murderer’s son!” He paused—and then with a sudden start, said—“There will be no grave for thee or thy mother to come and cry over!”

“Adam,” said Mr. Hylton, very anxiously, “weary not thyself thus—alarm not this poor child, by thus yielding to fear and despair; but rather, if it can hereafter remember what passeth here this day, may its thoughts be of thy love, and of thy gentleness! If it be the will of God that thou must die, and that

unjustly, as far as men are concerned, He will watch over and provide for this little soul, whom He, foreseeing its fate, sent into the world."

Ayliffe lifted the child with trembling arms, and pressed its cheeks to his lips. The little creature did not cry, nor appear likely to do so, but seemed the image of mute apprehension. The whole scene was so painful, that Mr. Hylton was not sorry when the Governor of the gaol approached, to intimate that the interview must cease. The prisoner, exhausted with violent excitement, quietly surrendered his child to his attendant, and then silently grasped the hand of Mr. Hylton, who thereupon quitted the cell; the door of which was immediately locked upon its miserable occupant: who was once again *alone*!

The inquiries which Mr. Hylton had caused to be set on foot with reference to Hundle proved to be utterly unproductive. What, indeed, had been the precise object which Mr. Hylton had proposed to himself in making them, beyond partially corroborating the statements made by Ayliffe himself at the trial, and whenever he had been interrogated on the subject, that he really had had reason to believe that Hundle was to be in the woods on the evening when Ayliffe had gone to lie in wait for him? When questioned on the subject, he said that he had ascer-

tained the intended visit of Hundle, by happening to overhear a conversation between him and another, both of whom had agreed to be in the wood in quest of game, as Ayliffe understood, on the memorable evening in question; and it had unhappily occurred to Ayliffe that this would afford him a fitting opportunity, not only of severely chastising Hundle, but of subjecting him to the severe penalties of the law against poaching, by detecting and capturing him in the very act. Mr. Hylton secretly hoped that Hundle might have absconded in consequence of Ayliffe's statements at the trial; but when Mr. Wigley rode over to the village where the man resided, for the purpose of making the desired inquiries concerning him, he was found engaged in his ordinary employment of a farmer's day-labourer, one which it seemed that he had never suspended since the disastrous occurrence which had led to the inquiry. He totally denied, and with an astonished air which impressed his interrogator, that he had ever made any such arrangement for going to the wood, as had been alleged by Ayliffe, or that he had ever dreamed of doing so; and that he was at his own cottage during the whole of the evening in question, as his mother also emphatically affirmed. He admitted that he had acted a shabby and cruel part towards Ayliffe about the

hare, but pleaded the distress of himself and his mother; and, when asked how he could have supposed that one in such circumstances as those of Ayliffe, could possibly pay any portion of the expected fine, said that he had heard of Ayliffe's having high friends, who would not see him in trouble for a pound or two; and mentioned the Vicar of Milverstoke as the chief of such friends, having heard Ayliffe himself speak of that reverend gentleman in terms of impassioned gratitude and respect. Hundle offered to be confronted with Ayliffe at any moment on the subject in question, and voluntarily accompanied Mr. Wigley to the person whom Ayliffe alleged to have concurred with him in his projected expedition; but the man had some ten days before, it seemed, gone to another part of the country. The only practical result, then, of these inquiries was, so far from being in any degree corroborative of Ayliffe's statement, to give it a flat contradiction; which unspeakably disheartened and distressed Mr. Hylton, tending to paralyze his humane exertions—nay, even to shake his confidence in Ayliffe's truthfulness and innocence.

The day after that on which Mr. Hylton had received this information, he resolved to see Ayliffe, and probe his conscience on the subject. Two little incidents occurred to him, on his melancholy ride from

Milverstoke to the gaol, which, though insignificant in themselves, yet made a lasting impression upon him. As he passed the cottage in which poor Ayliffe's child was living, he dismounted, in order to make his usual weekly payment out of Lady Emily's bounty; and on entering found his good wife, Mrs. Hylton, there, accompanied by his little daughter. As her father entered, she was in the act of putting, with childish excitement of manner, a small silver token into the hand of the child; who, though incapable of appreciating the gift, yet smiled upon the little giver with what appeared to Mr. Hylton to be an expression of ineffable sweetness. "And this is the child of the reputed murderer of Lord Alkmond!" thought he; and a tear came into his eyes, and he sighed deeply. As he rode along, that child's countenance accompanied him, pleading hard in favour of its most miserable parent!

When he had gone about two-thirds on his way, he saw at a distance the figure of a man sitting on a milestone, just under a tree—and who should this prove to be but old Ayliffe, on his knees resting his large brass-edged Bible. The old man was not for some time aware of Mr. Hylton's approach: the wind (which was very bitter) coming from an opposite direction, and Ayliffe sitting in a sad and thoughtful attitude, with

his eyes bent upon the ground. Mr. Hylton stopped for some moments to look at him—much moved, and even startled by the coincidence which had happened: that he, going to see the death-doomed son, in whom his confidence, till then so firm, was beginning to be shaken, should have encountered both son and father, each under circumstances so touching and unlooked-for.

Mr. Hylton had come up with Ayliffe before the latter seemed aware of his approach; and to his arrested eye the old man's countenance seemed invested with an aspect of grandeur. There might be seen in it gloom and grief; a certain stern composure and dignity, speaking of nature's own nobility. And he had, withal, an appearance so utterly poverty-stricken! And his features were so pallid and wasted!—He had walked upwards of five miles from his cottage to the gaol; and his wearied limbs required the rest which he was taking—the book which he carried, being also somewhat weighty for an old man's carrying so far.

He was bringing, he said, in answer to Mr. Hylton's inquiries, his own old Bible, to read out of it to his son, at his own earnest request; and to leave it with him constantly during the few remaining days of his life; "There is no difference in Bibles, Sir," said the old man with sorrowful deliberation of manner, "so each

be the pure book of God—that I do well know; but *this* one will my poor son weep precious tears to see; and I shall weep grievously over it, after he is gone!”

“My excellent, my pious friend,” said Mr. Hylton, “I go this day again to see your son; but with very heavy heart. How fast is wearing away his time! and yet I make no advance towards his rescue or pardon! No, not a step! And assuredly I do believe that he will die on the day now appointed by the law.”

“The will of God be done, Sir!” exclaimed Ayliffe, taking off his hat, as he spoke, and looking reverently upwards with an eye of awful expression.

“I grieve to say, Adam, that I can do nothing with my Lord Milverstoke, in the way of getting him to say that he doubts, be it never so little; or of prevailing on him to recommend to mercy!”

The old man covered his eyes with his hand, and shook his head sadly. After a long pause—“Sir,” said he, speaking in a low broken tone of voice, “he was a father, as *yet* I am. Some little while ago, he thought as little to lose his only son, as did I to have mine taken from me, as he will be a few days hence. Yet who hath done both these things; but Almighty God, whose creatures we all are? And if his Lordship does verily believe that my son slew his, who shall wonder if he think it right that my

poor son should die according to the law? But as for me, my days are now few and bitter, and this is like to close them somewhat sooner than they would have been. Yet have I not read this book which I have here in vain; and I bear malice to no man. Alas, my poor son's own sin first led him into the way that brought him down into this horrible pit; and God is just, His doings are never to be questioned; and if the punishment seem to us beyond the sin, that matter leave I humbly to God, who will one day make plain what He hath done, and why. And often think I what may be said for God's reasons in permitting this young noble to be slain, whom verily I believe"—here he took off his hat again—"my poor son slew not! Soon, Sir, to all appearance, must they meet, face to face, and in the presence of God; and for such meeting do I daily strive to prepare my son!"

All this was said, with some few intervals of silence, uninterrupted by Mr. Hylton; who listened to the speaker, and gazed at him, with thrilling and awe-subduing thoughts. "This man," said he to himself, "has not read that Book in vain! And oh! that I, with all mankind, might so read it!"

On his return to the parsonage that evening, after a brief but affecting interview with the prisoner, who

with unvarying and calm consistency re-asserted the truth of his statement concerning Hundle, and evinced a sensible improvement in the tone of his feelings, as his hopes diminished, his resignation increasing, he found Mr. Melcombe impatiently awaiting his arrival, with intelligence of a sufficiently exciting character, which had come from London by that afternoon's coach, in a letter from Mr. Melcombe's agent. The latter gentleman was a skilful and experienced man; and instantly on receiving Mr. Melcombe's instructions, in a case so calculated to excite his interest and stimulate his energies, had taken the best practicable means of becoming acquainted with the arrival at London, or any other port, of the 'Morning Star.' But, above all, he stationed a clerk of tact and vigilance near the Commodore Anson tavern at Wapping, with instructions to discover and announce the arrival there of John Jevons, or any other person belonging to the 'Morning Star.' The merchant to whom that vessel belonged, had been discovered by Mr. Melcombe without difficulty, through information afforded by Mr. Merton; and from such owner had been ascertained beyond a doubt the following highly satisfactory and apparently important information:—That the 'Morning Star' must, on the day in question, have been passing that part of the coast where Milverstoke Castle

was situated; the vessel having quitted the port to which she belonged, on that morning, and with a fair though intermitting wind; that John Jevons was the mate of the vessel; that there was on board a sailor named Harrup; that the place usually frequented by the sailors in London was the Commodore Anson; and that the destination of the vessel had been that which the letter specified. Why, however, the vessel had lain-to when opposite Milverstone Castle, except it had been becalmed—and why, moreover, the boat with Harrup in it had gone ashore, or whether, indeed, such a fact had happened at all, the owner knew not; but aware of the cause of the inquiries which were being made on the subject, he had promised to afford every information in his power, and at the earliest moment. Now the letter which Mr. Melcombe had brought from London was from his agent, announcing the arrival, on the preceding evening, of the ‘Morning Star;’ the discovery, late on the same night, at the Commodore Anson, of Jevons, the mate; and that the writer had obtained an appointment from the Secretary of State, at his office, for the ensuing morning—when he would be in attendance with Jevons and Harrup!

Mr. Hylton was so overjoyed and excited by this bright gleam of sunshine (for such he esteemed it),

that Mr. Melcombe was forced to remind him of the slight importance which, after all, might be attached to these circumstances by the high authorities in whose hands lay the fate of the prisoner. Mr. Melcombe was not so sanguine a man as Mr. Hylton, and better acquainted with the practical administration of justice; and when, by means of what he said, there appeared before Mr. Hylton's mind's eye, as it were, a pair of scales, in one of which were the proved and admitted facts of the case—and in the other was this mere possibility and ground for conjecture—the latter scale seemed, alas! instantly to kick the beam. Had there been time, Mr. Hylton would have started for London to be present at the all-important interview. That, however, being impracticable, he was obliged to wait for information by due course of post; and, to be sure, on the morning but one after the receipt of the above intelligence, Mr. Hylton rode over to Mr. Melcombe's office, and read with him the following deeply interesting letter from his London agent, Mr. Burnley:—

“ In the matter of Adam Ayliffe, Junior.

“ Pomegranate Court, Temple, 7th April.

“ Dear Sir,

“ I have just come from the Secretary of State's, where we have had an interview of consider-

able length, but not (I regret to say) of so satisfactory a character, as far, that is, as concerns the prisoner's interests, as could have been desired. His Lordship is a man of few words, but those prodigiously to the point, and he showed himself perfectly acquainted with the whole facts and bearings of the case; which, considering the present troubled state of affairs and the anxiety they occasion, is greatly to be praised. Mr. Under Secretary was present, and also paid great attention, and asked several close questions. The two men Jevons and Harrup (who were had in separately) behaved very properly, though somewhat flustered at first; but Jevons, on seeing the letter, said at once it was his, and explained why he wrote it; and Harrup said just what it was to be expected from the letter, that he could say. Namely, that there were two men running along the shore, near the water's edge; thought that one ran faster than the other: could not tell what sort of clothes they wore, nor whether they carried anything with them: and on seeing them, and hearing shots above in the wood, and thinking them poachers, lay on his oars for a moment, and sung out 'Hallo, my hearties!' When he had said the substance of all this, my Lord asked him the following few but pertinent questions: 'Do you know Adam Ayliffe, or any of his family or

friends?'—The man said that he had never even heard of the name: nor ever been at Milverstoke since he was a boy. 'How soon after your return to the vessel did you mention this circumstance to the mate, or to any one else?'—He answered, directly that he had got on deck, when he said, 'There 's been sport going on in yon woods.' 'Why had you been ashore?'—He said, to try to get some carpenter's tools; having left some of their own behind them at port. 'How long had you left the shore when you saw the men running?'—'About a quarter of an hour.' 'In what direction were they running?'—'Easterly—towards the east.' 'Would that be as if they were going away from, or towards, the wood?'—'Going away from it.' 'Does the wood come close down to the shore, or are there cliffs?'—The man could not say; but Mr. Under Secretary said he knew the place himself well, and whispered something to his Lordship which I could not hear. 'Did you see any Coast-guard station, or any of the Coast-guard?' 'No.' 'Did the man who ran appear to be tall or short?'—He had not taken sufficient notice, and it was also too dark to do so. 'Did you think anything more about this matter after mentioning it to the mate?'—No; not till he afterwards heard it talked of. 'When was that?'—When they were at Dunkirk. 'Who

mentioned it, and why?'—The captain brought a newspaper on board, and spoke to the mate, and they both looked at the log-book, and called down Harrup and reminded him of it. 'Who first told you of the matter when you came back to London?'—Then he mentioned my clerk, as I explained to his Lordship. 'Was it before or after the firing of the gun that you saw the man running?'—He thought it was within a very few minutes after. 'How many minutes, do you believe?'—Perhaps four or five; or it might be less. 'Did you hear a gun fired more than once?'—He thought twice, but it might have been even three times. 'What hour of the night might this have been, as nearly as you can recollect?'—'About ten o'clock.' 'Has there been any reward offered by Lord Milverstoke or the magistrates, for the discovery of any one connected with the transaction?' asked his Lordship of me; and I answered 'No.' Then Harrup was ordered to withdraw. Before Jevons was brought in, his Lordship asked me very particularly what inquiries we had made at Milverstoke, to ascertain whether any one near the sea-shore had observed persons running on the occasion in question. I told him what we had done, reading him your last letter to me, announcing that you could learn nothing on the subject. When Jevons was called

in, he gave, as I have already said, a clear and plain account of how he came to write the letter, disclaimed all knowledge of the Ayliffes, and knew but little of Milverstoke. Neither he nor any one on board had heard the sound of gun-shot from shore. His Lordship asked, very quietly, two or three acute questions, designed to detect any material difference between the accounts of those parts of the transaction which both must have observed; but I never heard any person answer more satisfactorily; it could have left no doubt in any one's mind that whatever the *value* or effect of the evidence, it was given truly and *bonâ fide*. Then Jevons was ordered to withdraw; and, after a few moments' silence, his Lordship said, addressing Mr. Under Secretary and me—'All that we have just heard might, had it then been known, possibly have been fit to lay before the jury; but they might have deemed it immaterial or irrelevant, or as showing only that possibly others were concerned *with the prisoner* in the murder—they escaping, and he happening to be detected: his guilt being, of course, in either case the same. But the persons represented as running along the shore may have had nothing whatever to do with the murder, nor known anything about it: what a slight foundation,' these were his Lordship's words, 'for so large a

superstructure ! The Lord Chief Justice, however, will be seen, and shown the notes of what has taken place this morning (a clerk had set down everything as it went on), and, in the mean time, those two persons who have been here to-day, should be forthcoming, if required. I think it right to intimate to you,' said his Lordship to me, 'for communication to the prisoner's friends, that, as I am at present advised, I see no grounds for delaying, beyond the period now fixed, the carrying into effect the sentence of the law. I regard the evidence adduced at the trial as of rare cogency, and, in truth, irresistible. There is, however, one matter not mentioned to-day, on which it is desirable to communicate with the Lord Chief Justice; and in the mean time you will be pleased to leave here the address of the clergyman who has taken so much interest in this case, and who called on me, and on the Lord Chief Justice upon this subject.' From his Lordship's manner, I should not be surprised if the Reverend gentleman have a communication made to him respecting some matter which he may have mentioned to the Lord Chief Justice. The moment that I have anything new, you may rely on hearing from me; and meanwhile I am,

"Your very faithful servant,

"JONATHAN BURNLEY."

“P.S. As you intend to take no costs in this matter nor shall I—regarding it as a matter of humanity. At the same time, if funds be provided by those well able to afford it, I think it would be not unreasonable for both you and me to be reimbursed the money which we may actually expend on the occasion; but equally with yourself, I will not hear of anything further.”

The other matter to which the Secretary of State referred, Mr. Hylton perfectly understood; and the allusion to it threw him into a brief and anxious reverie. He had not felt himself at liberty to communicate the point to which Lord Farnborough must have alluded, to Mr. Melcombe; whose inquiries concerning the matter, on the present occasion, he easily parried. Both he and Mr. Melcombe were somewhat dashed in spirit by the foregoing letter. Neither of them could deny the weight which there was in the Secretary of State's observations. As for the prospect of his being able to extort from Lord Milverstoke an explanation of the mysterious conversation at the banqueting-table, and—above all—permission to communicate it to the Secretary of State, Mr. Hylton had regarded it as being quite as much out of the question as procuring his Lordship to join in a recommendation to mercy. Ought his Lordship, indeed,

under all the dreadful circumstances of the case, to be pressed upon such a subject? It required no small amount of firmness even to contemplate making the effort. Momentous as were the interests which a strong sense of duty had impelled Mr. Hylton to take into his keeping—the saving an innocent man from the blighting death of the guilty—he nevertheless could not regard the unfortunate Earl of Milverstoke otherwise than as an object of profound sympathy; as one whose grieved and harassed heart should not be assailed with rude intrusiveness, but approached with the delicacy and deference due to the terrible sufferings with which it had pleased the wisdom of God to visit him. If Mr. Hylton verily believed in Ayliffe's innocence, he remembered that it was in bold disregard of all those appearances and facts which abundantly justified, not only the Earl of Milverstoke, but every dispassionate impartial person, in believing Ayliffe to be really guilty of that cowardly and savage murder, of which he had been openly, and fairly, convicted by a court of justice. What father might not be expected to act similarly, if similarly situated? To the Earl, Mr. Hylton had himself most expressly admitted, that if he had felt satisfied of Ayliffe's guilt, he would not interpose to shield a murderer from that punishment with which the law both of

God and man visited his crime. Mr. Hylton had brought himself to disbelieve in Aycliffe's guilt ; but how was he to bring to that conviction the cruelly bereaved father, the Earl of Milverstoke ? To attempt to coerce an understanding so clear and powerful as his ? For of this Mr. Hylton sometimes feared that his efforts were falling but little short. Yet he inwardly disclaimed, as equally absurd, insulting, cruel, and hopeless, all design to influence the feelings of Lord Milverstoke, independently of his judgment. Mr. Hylton was justly entitled to place much reliance on his own understanding, which was really of a superior order ; yet he often apprehensively asked himself what degree of confidence was he now—at this late stage of the affair—warranted in reposing in his own judgment, running counter as it did to that of the Lord Chief Justice and the Secretary of State, neither of them, surely, incapable of forming that judgment, or biased by partiality or any assignable improper motive whatever ; both of them, moreover, being men of high intellectual power, of great experience, and most humanely disposed. Fortified by their unshaken conclusions, did not the Earl of Milverstoke stand as it were upon a rock ; and might he not well be excused for repulsing Mr. Hylton's pertinacious efforts, with a kind of impatient scorn and indignation ? These were

reflections occasioning Mr. Hylton increasing anxiety and misgiving, especially with reference to what he feared to have been the unauthorised use which he had made, with the Lord Chief Justice, of Captain Lutteridge's intimation concerning an alleged occurrence at the Earl of Milverstoke's own table, and which it was sought by Mr. Hylton to connect with the death of Lord Alkmond. How injurious and unwarrantable must not this appear to the Earl! and this too, as he saw by Mr. Burnley's letter, the Lord Chief Justice had communicated to the Secretary of State; who seemed, in consequence of it, evidently about to take some step or other which might place Mr. Hylton in a position of greatly aggravated and alarming embarrassment and responsibility. And his fears were abundantly justified by the event; for, on the morning after Mr. Melcombe's visit, Mr. Hylton received by post a letter, wearing an official aspect, addressed "To the Rev. Henry Hylton, at the Vicarage, Milverstoke;" with the name of the Secretary of State, "FARNBOROUGH," in the corner, sealed with his seal of office, and bearing the authoritative words "On his Majesty's Service. *Immediate.*" A little fluttered by the sight of this formidable missive, Mr. Hylton withdrew with it into his library, where he opened it and read as follows:—

“London, 15th April.

“Reverend Sir,

“I am directed by Lord Farnborough to communicate with you upon a matter of considerable difficulty, and also of pressing urgency; as it relates to the case of a prisoner, Adam Ayliffe, capitally convicted at the last Assizes for your county, of the murder of the late Lord Viscount Alkmond, and now awaiting execution on the 18th instant, having been respited till that day by the Lord Chief Justice, in consequence of representations made by you to his Lordship, on the day ensuing that of the sentence. Lord Farnborough has bestowed the greater attention on this case, in consequence of the illness and absence from London of the Lord Chief Justice, with whom, however, his Lordship some days ago fully conferred on the subject. And I am now to recall to your recollection one particular ground proposed by you to the Lord Chief Justice for delaying execution on the prisoner. You represented, in a very confident manner, that if time were afforded, you might be able to discover the existence of facts at present enveloped in mystery, the tendency of which was, unless you are misunderstood, to connect the death of the deceased Lord Alkmond with matters which were not brought to notice at the trial. You are further reported to have

intimated, that the persons able to afford such information are of rank and station, indisposed to speak of the matter, at present, from scruples of delicacy, fearing the imputation of a breach of confidence. You also further stated, that the person to whom you had already spoken, and promised again to apply, had expressed an opinion (in which you yourself, as you stated, had heard sufficient *to prevent your concurrence*) that the information, when obtained, would prove to have no bearing on the case, relating, though it did, to the late Lord Alkmond's quitting Milverstoke Castle at a very unusual hour, and under very unusual circumstances, for the wood in which he was so shortly afterwards found murdered. I am directed to draw your most serious attention to the responsibility attaching to any person making these communications; and also to those who have it in their power to prove, at once, that these suggestions and representations are either well founded, or totally groundless. A very painful responsibility is, moreover, thus cast on those whose duty it is, to direct the administration of justice, and advise His Majesty in a matter of life and death. As a clergyman and magistrate, you need not be reminded of what Lord Farnborough is entitled to expect from you under these critical circumstances: and you are requested, without a mo-

ment's delay, to furnish his Lordship with such information as may be acted upon, one way or the other. And Lord Farnborough directs me to inform you finally, that in the absence of any further communication from you, or of intelligence of a decisively satisfactory nature relating to this subject, the present respite will not be extended.

“ I have the honour to remain,

“ Reverend Sir,

“ Your very faithful, and most obedient servant,

“ J. C. L. WYLMINGTON.

“ The Reverend Henry Hylton,

“ Vicar of Milverstoke.”

“ ‘ *The present respite will not be extended!* ’—Oh! words of portentous significance!” exclaimed Mr. Hylton aloud, in a despairing way, as, having finished reading the letter, he leaned back in his chair for nearly a quarter of an hour, in dire dismay and perplexity. What had sprung up out of his own unjustifiable precipitation! for by no gentler name could he now characterize what he had done in making to the Lord Chief Justice the communication of which that eminent and conscientious functionary had felt it his duty to apprise the Minister intrusted with the executive authority of the State; and whom the above

letter of the Under Secretary showed to have been plunged into deep anxiety by such communication. One of the first things that now recurred to Mr. Hylton's recollection, was the Earl of Milverstoke's most peremptory and emphatic assurance to him that the matter spoken of by Captain Lutteridge could have no bearing whatever upon the question of the prisoner's guilt or innocence: and so had, in the very first instance, said Captain Lutteridge himself! Had it thus become Mr. Hylton's duty, without harassing the Earl any more, to act upon his deliberate assurance, and write off to the Home Secretary, frankly abandoning as untenable the plea for delay which had called forth his Lordship's letter? But suppose he should do so: Ayliffe be executed: and it were to be afterwards discovered that the matter in question *had* a bearing, and a vital bearing, upon the question of his guilt or innocence; showed that whoever else might have committed this mysterious murder, Ayliffe had not; and that he had been hanged in spite of his vehement and unwavering denial of guilt and assertion of innocence, and without a stain on his previous character to lend colour to so frightful a charge as that in respect of which he had unjustly suffered? Was not that a possibility sufficient to make the most stout-hearted man shudder? Was,

then, Mr. Hylton again to importune the Earl upon the subject? to show him the letter from the Secretary of State? and leave with his Lordship the painful responsibility of withholding the desired information? Suppose he should demand from Mr. Hylton, why he had not at once conveyed to the authorities, with whom he had been so busily communicating, the Earl's own deliberate and emphatic declaration on the subject?

Mr. Hylton was a courageous man, and of inflexible firmness of purpose; yet he contemplated another interview with the Earl with grave, very grave, anxiety. Fear he knew not; but what was not due to the feelings of the father of a murdered son? And had not Lord Milverstone movingly acknowledged to him that, though the conversation of which he was in quest, had no bearing on the dreadful murder of his son, yet was it so connected with other associations and recollections, as to occasion his Lordship exquisite pain in adverting to it? Again; had not the Secretary of State addressed to him weighty matter; and was he not entitled to the prompt and decisive answer which he had demanded; and the refusal or neglect to afford which would plainly absolve him from all kind of responsibility, and a thousand-fold augment that which already rested upon others? Again;

Mr. Hylton was beginning to regard with intense disfavour and repugnance this attempt to extort and divulge private conversation, that which had passed in the unrestrained freedom of fancied security, the confidential intercourse of private life. It required the conviction of some positive and overwhelming necessity to overcome such feelings in the breast of a gentleman—and a gentleman, indeed, and of pure and high feelings, was Mr. Hylton. But all this while poor Adam Ayliffe was lying in irons, broken-hearted, and drawing nearer HOURLY to the ignominious agonies and horrors of the scaffold! *What was to be done?* indeed. Mr. Hylton, conscious of the purity of his motives, and yet perceiving the thick darkness which seemed to lie upon the path of duty, humbly commended himself and his proceedings to God, and besought His assistance, that he might not, from mistaken motives, be blindly and rashly attempting to thwart the will of Providence; and instead of furthering the ends of justice, frustrate and pervert its efforts to attain them. For suppose, after all, that Ayliffe were falsely protesting his innocence, had really slain Lord Alkmond in mistake for another, or—horrid thought—had, through Mr. Oxley's proceedings, fallen into a mortal phrenzy of hatred against the Earl of Milverstoke, and his son? How many had gone

to the scaffold, as loudly protesting their innocence as did Ayliffe, and concerning whose guilt there yet never was even a shadow of doubt! Distracted by these considerations, he folded up the letter, placed it in his pocket-book, ordered his horse, and resolved to go straightway and take counsel with quiet and judicious Mr. Melcombe. After having gone a little past the road which led to the barracks, "Why," said he to himself, suddenly stopping his horse, "Why should I not try my fate again with Captain Lutteridge?" He remained stationary for several minutes, and then, turning his horse's head, rode up to the barracks; resolved to read to the Captain the letter of the Secretary of State, and see what new view of the case it might present to that straightforward and well-meaning officer. The Captain received him with a sort of bluff caution; that of a plain unsuspecting man, who, feeling that he had, somehow or other, got himself into difficulties on former occasions, was now at all events resolved to present no salient points of attack. Mr. Hylton, with whom time was becoming momentarily more precious, came to the subject of his application in a moment; assuring the Captain that he, Mr. Hylton, had taken no steps of any kind since they had met on the last occasion; but that the affair on which he had honoured himself

by then speaking to the Captain, had suddenly assumed a more serious aspect than ever.

"This, Sir, in short, is a quandary; one you have got into, and must get out of," said the Captain, in a matter-of-fact manner; "and how do you intend doing it? I can't help you. We military people generally, you see, look a hair's-breadth or so beyond our noses, if one may so speak, in the moves we make—considering not only how to advance, but how to retreat; not only, do you see, how to get to a place, but, by Jupiter—forgive me, Sir!—what to do when there—and then, how to get back again!"

"I cannot deny, Captain Lutteridge," said Mr. Hylton, with a very harassed air, "that I feel myself in a terrible perplexity"—

"Then give me, so please you, your hand," said the Captain, advancing to him cordially, with his right arm extended. "You know what my opinion was 'tother day when you gave me the honour of a visit; and I thought, by ——! hem! I ask your pardon, Sir—but—eh, Sir? Has anything new come of it?"

"I have received, within this hour," said Mr. Hylton, very seriously, while he opened his pocket-book and took out the Secretary of State's letter, "a letter of such weight and consequence, that I shall leave it to speak for itself, Captain Lutteridge."

“All about that abominable vagabond, I suppose, who”—

“Captain Lutteridge,” said Mr. Hylton, in a very feeling way, “you pain me, indeed. Why should you, an officer, a man of birth, a gentleman, use language such as this towards a poor wretch at this moment shivering in irons, and expecting hourly to die an unjust death, as I believe it will be, since, as I have told you, I think him innocent?”

“I ask your pardon, Reverend Sir,” said the Captain, very courteously; “but do not forget that we think differently about this affair—at least, you and Lord Milverstone do. As for me,” he added, with a look of sudden vexation, “little care I, truly, whether this gentleman live or die!”

“This is the letter I spoke of, Captain. Will you read it?” said Mr. Hylton: and his companion immediately took the letter, reading every line of it as scrupulously as though it had been some death-warrant addressed to, and requiring execution by, himself. “Phew! Phew! Sir!” he exclaimed, or rather whistled, when he had finished reading the letter, down even to the signature; “by this time you must be somewhat sick of this business! Well, I do say, not intending disrespect to civilians, but—give me, Reverend Sir, a military trial, and a quick death according to order,

without questions asked after the Court hath broke up! It saves a world of trouble—all such as this you are giving yourself, and occasioning others, too!”

“But—forgive me, Captain—what say you to the substance of this letter? Is my tongue to be tied, and is yours, and this man to die, therefore, possibly unjustly?”

“Why, Sir, as to the letter, what is the Secretary of State to my Lord Milverstoke or me? Can he force open our lips? No; nor fifty Lord Farnboroughs, Sir!”

“But I trust you see now how careful I was, with both my Lord Farnborough and the Chief Justice, to say nothing, till authorized, about persons or places, as well as things?”

“That, Sir, of course, you would be,” interposed the Captain, drily.

“But let me ask,” continued Mr. Hylton, “supposing this letter had been addressed to *you*, Captain, and you were in my place—what answer would you give?”

“Why, Sir, I would not have put myself in your place, do you see; for I should have deemed myself to be (which doubtless you, Reverend Sir, by reason of your holy cloth, are not) meddling somewhat.”

“But, Captain Lutteridge, I implore an answer—time presses frightfully!”

“Why, you see, Sir, I am a soldier, and you a par-

son, Reverend Sir: therefore"— the Captain paused; the consequence, of which he had indicated the approach, not appearing, or presenting itself, exactly when he wished it.

"I must, in virtue of the sacred office which I hold, and of which you have reminded me, implore you to let no imaginary notions of honour"—

"Honour!—honour imaginary! I give you my word, Reverend Sir, that I never heard anything so monstrous fall from man before!" said the Captain, with an amazed air.

"Oh, Sir, neither said I, nor thought I, aught that you could except to," replied Mr. Hylton. "No man values honour more than I; nor think I any man living can have a truer, keener sense of it than you, Captain Lutteridge: all I dread is, lest, while you strain honour too far, a fellow-creature be sacrificed."

"What would you then, Reverend Sir," inquired the Captain, somewhat appeased, "with me, now, after what has before passed between us? For I do protest that I know not! Say plainly, Sir!"

"This being an imminent matter of life and death," said Mr. Hylton, after a pause, "do you feel yourself at liberty to authorize me, should I deem it proper, to communicate to the Secretary of State what you told me before I went up to London?"

"No, Sir," replied the Captain, quietly.

"Is that really your final determination, dear Captain?" inquired Mr. Hylton, with such a kind of intensity in his manner, as quite touched the soldier's heart.

"Upon my word of honour, Sir, I really fear it is. You see, Sir, I have often talked over this matter with my brother-officers; and we all, being bred alike, think alike. Where one's own honour, and another man's life, are in conflict, what the deuce to do, we know not. We made not honour: it is made for us; it governs us all, or ought; and it shall govern me, and be obeyed, so help—hem! I beg your pardon, Sir, for what I was going to say, but did not, you being a clergyman."

"I am distracted!" said Mr. Hylton, pressing his hand to his forehead.

"So methinks, with much respect, you have good reason to be, Reverend Sir. Look you at the way in which you have fixed everybody: my Lord Milverstone: my Lord Farnborough: me: but most especially yourself. Surely, good Sir, it was not I that did all this!"

"True, true, Captain," replied Mr. Hylton, with a melancholy air, and sighing deeply; "and yet, had you not yourself, with all a soldier's most honour-

able frankness, first volunteered to tell me all this”—

“Piff! paff!—Phew!” exclaimed the Captain, suddenly starting up as if he had just received a pistol-shot. “Why, Sir—egad—you are right! What you say is quite true!” Captain Lutteridge stood, rubbing his chin, and gazing earnestly, in perturbed silence at Mr. Hylton. “Why, hang me, Sir, if it is not I that have put you and everybody else into a false position!” He paused, gazing at Mr. Hylton with the look of a man astounded by some sudden discovery. “Sir, in his Majesty’s service there is not, I do believe, a greater fool at this moment than am I, Captain Lutteridge. The Devil hath this day suddenly paid me off, handsomely, a somewhat long score. I beseech you, Reverend Sir, in this horrible state that I am in, tell me what should I do? I own all this never occurred to me, nor those that I have talked with on the subject! I wonder my brother-officers yonder never thought of it; for as for myself, I am a fool—an arrant fool! Sir—I—I beg your pardon, for putting you into all this difficulty.”

“My dear Captain,” said Mr. Hylton, mildly, having waited till the Captain’s excitement had a little abated, “I really meant not to suggest anything of this kind: it did not occur to me”—

“Oh yes, it did, Sir; but you were too civil to say it. I stand an ass, Sir—a very ass before you! And what the deuce to do I know not; yet, on my honour, I never meant to do anything but what was proper and humane.”

“Still, Captain, let us not overlook the real difficulty of the case, nor forget what is due to yourself and also to me, as men of honour, as well as of humanity and religion. It is I that have entailed all this perplexity, by my unauthorized communication of what you had so frankly told me, in your love of justice and fair play. I may have erred in what I did—but what else could I have done? I was forced to leave by that night’s coach, or all would have been in vain; and, had I not made *some use* of what you had told me, I might as well have stayed here. And when I came back, and poor Ayliffe’s body was swinging in the air, you might have reproached me for my false honour and punctilio, and (for aught I could then have known) might have said that, in a matter like this, your delicacy would have given way.”

“Sir, there’s no gainsaying it. What a puzzle you must have been in! Sometimes, it seems, things will so turn out, that no man can possibly know how to act; and then, the only thing is, to do nothing, which can never be wrong.”

“Oh, Captain, Captain! cannot it? Look at this case—this very case!”

“I don’t know, for the life of me, what to do!” said he, walking hastily up and down the room. “Let me, Sir, read the letter again. It is a somewhat long-winded round-about dispatch. Methinks I would have said as much in twenty words.” He read it over pretty rapidly. “One thing, Sir, it shows, that you certainly acted very handsomely at head-quarters, in not committing one whom you had no right to commit.”

“Indeed, Captain, I so deeply appreciated your disinterested and noble anxiety to assist the cause of justice and humanity, that I was doubly—trebly—on my guard.”

“Quite correct, Sir, to be so—quite.”

“Now, suppose, dear Captain, that you had happened to be in London at the time, and had thoughts of going at once to head-quarters to prevent injustice in this very matter, being unwittingly done: don’t you think you might have said just as much to my Lord Chief Justice, as you did to me?—and felt that Lord Milverstoke could have no right to interfere in such a case of life and death as ought to be left to every man’s own conscience alone to deal with?”

“There’s no knowing what a man might do when suddenly pushed, and off his guard. But, for the

matter of this letter,"—he turned to it again,—“it seems that you very handsomely told the Judge what I said, that I thought the matter in question had no bearing on the case.”

“I did, most distinctly, most emphatically.”

“But, forgive me, Reverend Sir,—how came you to say, thereupon, that you differed with me?”

“Pardon me, dear Captain; I thought I was right in doing so. It appeared to me that at a point of time so all-important as that of Lord Alkmond’s quitting the Castle for the wood”—

“That, Sir, is what I so marvel—have always marvelled—at. What possible bearing—pshaw!—what could duelling have to do with this vagabond and Lord—”

“*Duelling!*” echoed Mr. Hylton, with a great start, while Captain Lutteridge sprang clean out of the chair in which he had the moment before sat down, and slapped his hand desperately on his mouth, as though he would have forced back the word that had leaped forth, never to return.

“Did I say *duelling*?” commenced the Captain, in a low tone, after a long gasp, and staring amazedly at his companion, who looked equally astounded, with him.

“Yes, you did, Captain Lutteridge!” said Mr.

Hylton, in an absent manner—having fallen suddenly into a reverie.

The Captain stood still, his eyes fixed on the floor, in silence.

“Bah!” at length he exclaimed, with such a violent stamp of his foot, that the floor quivered under it. “I—I—look on this as a stroke of fate, Sir!” said he, approaching Mr. Hylton with a desperate air, his face quite flushed. “We don’t part, Reverend Sir, till we have agreed on what is to be done with the word that hath thus accursedly jumped out from me,” said the Captain, hastily going to the door, which he locked, and took out of it the key. Then he strode to the fire-place, and gave Mr. Hylton, in passing, a furious glance. “Look you, Sir, we soldiers are plain people; and if you, being one cunning in speech, came hither to lay a trap for me”—

“Captain Lutteridge,” replied Mr. Hylton, with dignity, “your language shows that you labour under sudden excitement. Do you, now that I remind you of your expression, really mean, Sir, to insinuate that I, a Christian minister, and, I trust, a gentleman also, could, under any conceivable circumstances whatever, stoop to the baseness of inveigling you into a breach of confidence? I forgive you, Captain Lutteridge, and also the gross and, saving your presence, vulgar

indignity," continued Mr. Hylton, pointing sternly to the door, "which you have just perpetrated upon me."

"Mr. Hylton—Reverend Sir—I—beg your pardon; I—ask forgiveness, having quite forgotten myself, and you too," said Captain Lutteridge, bowing profoundly, while the colour a little deserted his cheek; and hastily stepping to the door, he unlocked and threw it open. Then, returning to Mr. Hylton, he resumed—"You are as free as air, Sir: free to go whither you please; to say, to do, what you please, Sir; any where; to any body. You are a gentleman, Sir; and I, an officer, have not, I fear, acted as became an officer and a gentleman."

Nothing could exceed the utter soldier-like simplicity, and the gravity, and the fine spirit, with which all this was said by Captain Lutteridge.

"'Tis all forgiven—forgotten: it is as though it had never happened, my dear Captain," replied Mr. Hylton; "and I shall deem myself honoured if you will suffer me to shake you by the hand, for whose character I have already learned to feel great admiration. Never saw I one whom I believed to be actuated by nobler motives; of that be assured: and as for this strange word that has escaped you, it is buried *here*"—he placed his right hand on his heart—"it is considered by me, already, as utterly unspoken."

“God bless you, Reverend Sir; give me your hand!” said Captain Lutteridge, almost with tears in his eyes, grasping the proffered hand of Mr. Hylton. “I never came in my life near one that behaved with such handsomeness, by — I beg pardon, Sir! But I never did! And I’m beginning, I know not how, to take quite a different view of the whole matter. By Jove, Sir, your whole conduct on behalf of this poor wretch is disinterested and great, beyond utterance. The trouble you have taken—what you have put up with while doing all that you have done, no one thinks so high of as your humble, unworthy servant, Captain Lutteridge; and God Almighty himself only can reward you, for he put it all in your heart to do! Sir—I—I almost begin to think this man—God forgive me for calling him a vagabond, poor wretch—must be, as you say, innocent; though his case has, it must be owned, a desperate ugly look, or you would not have been led to do all you have done; and if so”—the Captain paused for a moment—“I have been all this while doing my best to tie the rope round his neck!”

While Captain Lutteridge was saying all this, Mr. Hylton appeared to be attentively listening to him in silence; but his mind was profoundly engaged with that subject, which had been suggested to it by the word that had fallen from Captain Lutteridge—

Duelling!—Duelling? Had *that*, then, been the topic which Lord Alkmond could not bear to hear talked of, and by which he had been so much agitated, as Captain Lutteridge had represented? Why go out into the wood—and directly from the table? The more Mr. Hylton thought of it, and his ideas sprung up and followed one another with lightning rapidity—the greater were his amazement and anxiety; for, he recollected Lord Milverstoke's great agitation on the subject being mentioned; his Lordship's acknowledgment that it occasioned him great agony, from reasons of which, as his Lordship had said, Mr. Hylton could have no notion; and his solemn declaration that it had no connection with, or bearing upon, the awful bereavement which he had suffered. And again: what reason could there be for his Lordship's stern refusal to allow the matter to be communicated to the official authorities, even in so grave a case as that affecting the life of a fellow-creature? And he had said, moreover, that it might, if talked about, afford matter for injurious and harassing gossip and speculation! He was thus getting deeper and deeper into gloomy speculation, when Captain Lutteridge's last words, alluding to the halter round Ayliffe's neck, startled Mr. Hylton out of his reverie—

“True—certainly, Captain Lutteridge,” said he, as

if still somewhat confounded with the course of his own bewildering reflections—"but—that single word which you have so naturally let fall, at a moment when you were off your guard, has plunged me headlong into a sea of conjecture and perplexity. I own myself utterly at a loss how to connect this conversation with the death of poor Lord Alkmond; and consider you warranted (for all that at present occurs to me) in your frequent assertion that there really was no such connection."

"That may all be, Sir, and perhaps is really so; but now the point is, what must be done herein? Anything, or nothing?"

"Were I disposed to make any use, and you to permit me, of the information which I now possess"—

"Get Lord Milverstoke's leave, and the thing is done! If his Lordship care not, I am sure I don't."

"But what if his Lordship should hear that which has happened here to-day, Captain Lutteridge?"

"What if he do? It will make him angry, very angry, with me; but that I cannot help. He may curse my folly, but cannot question my honour: and what say you, by Jove, Sir!—to my going myself to my Lord Milverstoke, and plainly telling him what has happened? If it will serve your purpose, in this strait that you are in, why I will go at once, and within

an hour's time his Lordship shall know all that has happened, and do as he pleases."

"Resolution such as yours cannot be daunted, I see, my dear Captain; and I entreat you, then, to do as you propose; and in justice to me, explain how it fell out, without effort of mine, and that I will of course neither say a word, nor take a step, till I have his Lordship's consent to do so."

"I will do all this, and the sooner the better: and why may I not tell him of Lord Farnborough's letter? I'm sure there's nothing can come of it, though. Men don't fight duels with bludgeons, and at night-time, eh? And strike from behind, too? You don't suppose anything so wild as all that? Had my Lord Alkmond been stabbed or shot, the case might have looked somewhat different. But duelling was doubtless the thing talked of that night, and a bloody duel was spoken of, too, that had no long time before taken place. All this, however, let us see what my Lord Milverstoke will say to. He, for aught I know, may let you go up to London with your news, and make what you can of it. 'Tis a hopeful case, truly; but here is my horse, and within an hour shall I learn what his Lordship hath to say to this my folly."

The Captain and Mr. Hylton then mounted their horses; the former galloping off towards Milverstoke

Castle ; the latter to the town where Mr. Melcombe resided, with whom he was more anxious than ever to confer on the subject of the Secretary of State's letter.

CHAPTER VI.

As Mr. Hylton rode along, he felt a miserable suspicion strengthening in his mind, that the mystery on which he had been placing so fond but gratuitous a reliance, was vanishing into thin air, as far as concerned any probable connection between it and the tragical end of Lord Alkmond. The last words of bluff Captain Lutteridge—the bludgeon, the pistol, the rapier, the dagger—quite haunted Mr. Hylton, forcing upon him an inference destructive of his hopes on behalf of Ayliffe. He of course made no mention to Mr. Melcombe of the accidental disclosure of Captain Lutteridge; but both of them were greatly perplexed as to the course proper to be taken with reference to the Secretary of State's letter, which nevertheless loudly demanded that *something* should be done, and that something quickly. Little thought Captain Lutteridge, as inwardly cursing his own stupidity at every step he took, he hastened on to the Castle, of the scene which his announced arrival would terminate. 'Twas one between young Lady Emily and her

father, with whom she was angel-like pleading the desperate cause of Ayliffe! Any one who had been present, hearing the conversation which had taken place in the sick chamber of Lady Alkmond, between her Ladyship and Lady Emily, on the subject of Ayliffe, might have believed himself listening to the converse of two angels: so gentle, so pitiful, so pious was it, as no words can tell. Lady Alkmond lay in bed, in extreme weakness, in a state most precarious; so frightful had been the shock sustained by a delicate system, at a period when that delicacy was infinitely enhanced by the prospect of another addition to the ancient house of her murdered Lord. The Earl, on entering her chamber at his usual hour, on the morning of the day on which Mr. Hylton and the Captain's last interview had taken place, on sitting down beside the bed, leaned down and kissed the lily-hued cheek, and pressed the slight attenuated fingers of the gentle sufferer, with an air of inconceivable tenderness. Had his attention not been entirely absorbed by her whom he had come to visit, he might have observed Lady Emily, who sat on the opposite side of the bed, looking pale and apprehensive: for she knew that Lady Alkmond intended to utter one word—only one word—into the Earl's ear, on his retiring, which Lady Emily had undertaken afterwards to enforce upon her father, with all her

powers of dutiful and loving persuasion and intercession. She trembled like an aspen leaf, therefore, when the Earl, after sitting rather longer than usual, rose to take his departure, Lady Alkmond gazed at him sweetly, and as he kissed her forehead, and clasped her hand, she softly whispered "Forgive." Lady Emily observed her father slightly start—but only very slightly: he looked for a moment earnestly at Lady Alkmond; and after a second time kissing her, withdrew in silence. When he had quitted the chamber, Lady Emily glided round to the side of her sister, and both of them remained for some moments silent, and with beating hearts.

"Don't fear, love," whispered Lady Alkmond.

"I tremble, Agnes; I feel I do, but 'tis not from fear. I will do what I have promised!"

Lady Emily's fingers gently clasped those of her sister-in-law, whose beautiful cheek was of an ashy whiteness, and her bosom heaved; for Lady Alkmond knew the firmness of the resolution which she had formed, to follow her stern father to his library, soon after he had quitted the chamber where they were sitting, and brave the peril of angering him upon a subject on which he had never hitherto interchanged a syllable with her. And she well knew his fierce inflexibility of character, and that on the trying topic

which she was going to urge, that inflexibility would be exhibited with tenfold force. But she had received several letters from Mrs. Hylton, so feelingly advocating the cause of Ayliffe, his dying wife, and unfortunate little son; and so strenuously protesting the writer's and her husband's conviction, of Ayliffe's innocence, that Lady Emily resolved, cost what effort it might, to make an attempt to wring from her father that expression of a desire for mercy to be extended to the prisoner, which Mrs. Hylton assured her would probably be attended with success, and save an innocent man from the horrible and ignominious death of a murderer. That morning she had been early in his library, and placed a little copy of the New Testament on the table at which he usually sat, with a slip of paper in it, on which she had written, in pencil, the words "Matthew xviii. 35." On his return from Lady Alkmond's room, he repaired to his library, in which he walked to and fro for some time, meditating with no slight sternness and displacency on the word which had fallen from Lady Alkmond. He suspected its true import and object; and on taking his seat, and opening with some surprise the Testament which lay before him, guided by the reference written by the trembling fingers of his daughter, he read as follows:—"So likewise shall my

heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not, every one his brother, their trespasses." This verse the Earl read hastily, then laid down the book, folded his arms, and leaned back in his seat, not with subdued feelings, but very highly indignant. He now saw clearly what had been intended by the faint but impressive whisper of Lady Alkmond, even could he have before entertained a doubt upon the subject. Oh, why did not thoughts of the heavenly temper of these two loving and trembling spirits melt his stern heart? 'Twas not so, however: and even *anger* swelled within that FATHER'S breast of untamed fierceness—anger, almost struggling and shaping itself into the utterance of 'Interference! intrusion! presumption!' After a long interval, in which his thoughts were thus angrily occupied, he re-opened the Testament, and again read the sublime and awful declaration of the Redeemer of mankind; yet smote it not his heart. And after a while, removing the paper, he calmly replaced the sacred volume on the spot from which it had been taken by Lady Emily. Not long after he had done so, he heard a very faint tapping at the distant door, but without taking any notice of it; although he had a somewhat disturbing suspicion as to the cause of that same meek application, and the person by whom it was made. The sound was presently

repeated, somewhat louder ; on which “Who’s there? —enter!” called out the Earl, loudly, and in his usual stern tone, looking apprehensively towards the door—which was opened, as he had thought, and perhaps feared it might be, by Lady Emily.

“It is I, dear papa,” said she, closing the door after her, and advancing rather rapidly towards him, who moved not from his seat ; though the appearance of—NOW—his only child, and that a daughter, most beautiful in budding womanhood, and approaching a FATHER with timid, downcast looks, might well have elicited some word or gesture of welcoming affection and tenderness.

“What brings you hither, Emily?” he inquired coldly, as his daughter, in her loveliness and terror, stood within a few feet of him, her fine features wearing an expression of blended modesty and resolution.

“Do you not know, my dearest papa?” said she, gently ; “do you not suspect ? Do not be angry!—do not, dear papa, look so sternly at me ! I come to speak with you, who are my father, in all love and duty.”

“I am not stern—I am not angry, Emily. Have I not ever been kind to you ? Why, then, this unusual mode of approaching and addressing me ? Were I a mere tyrant, you could not show better than your present manner does, that I am such.”

His words were kind, but his eye and his manner were blighting. His daughter's knees trembled under her. She glanced hastily at the table in quest of the little book which her hands had that morning placed there ; and not seeing it, her heart sunk.

"Be seated, Emily," said her father, moving towards her a chair, and gently placing her in it immediately opposite to him, at only a very little distance. She thought that she had never till that moment seen her father's face ; or, at least, had never before noticed its true character. How cold and severe was the look of the penetrating eyes now fixed on her—how rigid were the features—how commanding the expression which they wore—how visibly clouded with sorrow, and marked with the traces of suffering !

"And what, Emily, would you say ?" he inquired, calmly.

"Dearest papa, I would say, if I dared, what my sister said to you so short a time ago—*Forgive !*"

"Whom ?" inquired the Earl, striving to repress all appearance of emotion.

"Him who is to die on Monday next—Adam Ayliffe. Oh, my dearest papa, do not—oh, do not look so fearfully at me !"

"You mean, Emily, *the murderer of your brother !*"

He paused for a moment. "Am I right? Do I understand you?" inquired her father, gloomily.

"But I think that he is not—I do believe that he is not."

"But how can it concern *you*, Emily, to think or believe on the subject? Good child, meddle not with what you understand not. Who has put you upon this, Emily?"

"My own heart, papa."

"Bah, girl!" cried the Earl, unable to restrain his angry impulse, "do not patter nonsense with your father on a subject like this. You have been trained and tutored to torment me on this matter!"

"Papa!—my papa!—I trained! I tutored! By whom? Am I of your blood?" said Lady Emily, proudly and indignantly.

"You had better return, my child, to your occupations"—

"My occupation, dearest papa, is here, and, so long as you may suffer me to be with you, to say few, but few words to you. It is hard if I cannot, I who never knowingly grieved you in my life. Remember that I am now your only child. Yet I fear you love me not as you ought to love an only child, or you could not speak to me as you have just spoken." She paused for a moment, and added, as if with a sudden desperate

impulse—"My poor sister and I do implore you to give this wretch a chance of life, for we both believe that he is innocent!"

For a second or two the Earl seemed really astounded; and well he might, for his youthful daughter had suddenly spoken to him with a precision and distinctness of language, an energy of manner, and an expression of eye, such as the Earl had not dreamed of her being able to exhibit, and told of the strength of purpose with which she had come to him.

"And you both believe that he is innocent!" said he, echoing her words, too much amazed to utter another word.

"Yes, we do! we do! in our hearts. My sister and I have prayed to God many times for His mercy; and she desires me to tell you that she has forgiven this man Ayliffe, even though he did this dreadful deed, and so have I; wife and sister of the dear one dead, we both forgive, even though the poor wretch be guilty; but we believe him innocent, and if he be, oh, Heaven forbid that on Monday he should die!"

"Emily," said the Earl, who had waited with forced composure till his daughter had ceased, "do you not think that your proper place is in your own apartment, or with your suffering sister-in-law?"

“ Why should you thus treat me as a child, papa ?” inquired Lady Emily, scarcely able to restrain her tears.

“ Why should I not ?” asked her father, calmly.

Lady Emily looked to the ground for some moments in silence.

“ Does it not occur to you as possible that you are meddling? meddling with matters beyond your province? Is it fitting, *girl*,” he continued, unable to resist an instantaneous but most bitter emphasis on the word, “ that you should be HERE, talking to me at all, for one moment even, on a matter which I have never thought of naming to you—a child ?”

“ I am a child, papa ; but I am *your* child, and your only one ; and love you more than all the whole world.”

“ Obey me, then, as a proof of that love : retire to your chamber, and there wonder at what you have ventured—presumed this morning to do.”

Lady Emily felt the glance of his eye upon her, as though it had lightened ; but she quailed not.

“ My dear, my only parent, I implore you send me not away ; let me—”

“ Emily, I cannot be disobeyed ; I am not in the habit of being disobeyed by any one ; it is very sad that I should see the attempt first made by a child.”

“ Oh, papa ! forgive me ! forgive me ! ” She arose, and, approaching him hastily, as she observed him about to advance, sunk on one knee before him, clasping her hands together. “ Oh, hear me for but a moment. Never knelt I before but to God, yet kneel I now to my father. Oh, have mercy ! nay, be JUST ! ”

“ Why, Emily, verily I fear that long confinement and want of exercise and change, and air, are preying upon your mind ; you are not speaking rationally. Rise, child, and do not pursue this folly—or I may think you mad ! ” He disengaged her hands gently from his knee, which they had the moment before clasped, and raised her from her kneeling posture, she weeping bitterly.

“ I am not mad, papa, nor is my sister ; but we fear lest God’s anger should fall upon you, nay, upon us all, if you will not listen to the voice of compassion.”

“ Be seated, Emily,” said the Earl. “ Excited as you are at present,” he continued, with rapidly increasing sternness of manner, “ no words of mine will be able to satisfy you of the grievous impropriety, nay, the cruel absurdity of all this proceeding. You talk to me like a parrot about mercy, and compassion, and God’s anger, and so forth, as though you understood what you were saying, and I understood not what I am doing, what I ought to do, and what I have done.

Child, you forget yourself, me, and your duty to me. How dared you to profane yonder Testament, and insult your father by placing it before him as you did this morning? Did you do so?"

"I did," she answered, weeping.

"You presumptuous girl! forgetful of the fifth commandment!"

"Oh, say not so! say not so! I love, I reverence you—and I FEAR you, now!" said Lady Emily, gazing at him with tears running down her cheeks; her dark hair partially deranged; her hands clasped in a supplicatory manner. "I prayed to God, first, that I might not be doing wrong; that you might not be angry with me; that if angry, you might forgive me!"

"Angry with you? Have I not cause? Never dared daughter do such thing to father before! You presume to rebuke and threaten me—*me*—with the vengeance of Heaven, if I yield not to your sickly, dreaming, drivelling sentimentality. Silence!" he exclaimed, perceiving her about to speak very earnestly. "I have not had my eyes closed, I tell you now, for days past—I have observed your changed manner—you have been deliberating long beforehand how to perpetrate this undutifulness! As though my heart had not been already struck as with a thunderbolt from Heaven—you, forsooth, you idle, unthinking child!

must strive to stab it—to wound me! to insult me! This is not your own doing: you dared not have thought of it! You are the silly tool of others. Silence! hear me, undutiful girl!”

“ Papa, I cannot hear you say all this, in which you are so wrong. No tool am I of anybody! Twice have you said this thing!” Her figure the Earl perceived involuntarily becoming erect as she spoke, and her eye fixed with steadfast brightness upon his. Had he been sufficiently calm and observant, he might have seen in his daughter at that moment a faint reflexion of his own lofty spirit—intolerant of injustice. “ And even you, papa, have no right whatever thus to talk to me. If I have done wrong, chide me becomingly; but all that you have said to me only hurts me, and stings me, and I cannot submit to it—”

“ Lady Emily, to your chamber!” said the Earl, with a stately air, rising; so did his daughter.

“ My Lord!” she exclaimed magnificently; her tall figure drawn up to its full height, and her lustrous eyes fixed unwavering upon his own. Neither spoke for a moment; and the Earl began, he knew not why, to feel great inward agitation, as he gazed at the erect figure of his silent and indignant daughter.

“ My child,” said he, at length, faintly, with a quivering lip; and extending his arms, he moved a step

towards her; on which she sprung forward into his arms, throwing her own about his neck, and kissing his cheek passionately. His strong will for once had failed him; his full eyes overflowed, and a tear fell on his daughter's forehead. She wept bitterly; for a while he spoke not; but gently led her to a couch, and sat down beside her.

"Oh, papa, papa!" she murmured, "how I love you!"

For a moment he answered not, struggling, and with partial success, to overcome the violence of his emotions. Then he spoke in a low deep tone—

"The voices of the dead are sounding in my ears, Emily! the tranquil dead!" 'Tis said, my Emily,"—he paused for some moments, and his agitation was prodigious,—“that stern was I to your sweet mother”—

"Oh, dear, dearest, best beloved by daughter, never!" she cried vehemently, struggling to escape from his grasp, for he held her rigidly while gazing at her with agonised eyes.

"And I now fearfully feel—I fear—that stern I was, as stern I have this day been to you. Forgive me, ye meek and blessed dead!"—his quivering lips were closed for a moment, as were his eyes. "Oh, Emily! she is looking at me through your eyes. Oh, how like!" he remarked, as if speaking to himself. Lady Emily

covered her eyes, and buried her head in his bosom.

“Do you, my Emily, forgive me?”

“Oh, papa! no, no; what have I to forgive? Everything have I to love! my own, sweet papa! Much I fear that I may have done what a daughter ought not to have done! I have grieved and wounded a father that tenderly loved me”—

“Ay, my child, I do;” he whispered tremulously, gently drawing her slender form nearer to his heart. “Emily,” said he, after awhile, “go, get me that Testament which you placed before me; oh, go, dear child!” She still hung her head, and made no motion of going. “Go, get it me; bring it to me!”

She rose without a word, and brought it to him; and while he silently read the verse to which she had directed his attention, she sat beside him, her hands clasped together, and her eyes timidly fixed on the ground.

“It was in love, and not presumption, my Emily, that you laid these awful words before me!”

“Indeed, my papa, it was,” said she, bursting into tears.

He appeared about to speak to her, when words evidently failed him suddenly. At length—“And when that sweet soul”—he paused, “this morning whispered in my ear, did she know of this that you

had done?" Lady Emily could not speak. She bowed her head in acquiescence, and sobbed convulsively. Her father was fearfully agitated. "Wretch that I am!—I am not worthy of either of you!" Lady Emily flung her arms round him fondly, and kissed him. "I am yielding to great weakness, my love," said he, after a while, with somewhat more of composure. "Yet, never shall I—never can I—forget this morning! I have long felt, and feared, that I was not made to be loved: I have seen it written in people's faces. Yet can I love!"

"I know you can! I know you do, my own dear papa! Do you not believe that I love you? that Agnes loves you?"

"I do, my Emily—I do! Yet till this moment have I felt alone in life. In this vast pile, to me how gloomy and desolate! with these woods, so horrible, around me, I have been alone—utterly alone! And yet were you with me—you, my only daughter—who, I suppose, dared not tell me how much you loved me!"

"Oh, do not say so, papa! I knew your grief and suffering. They were too sacred to be touched—I wept for you, but in my own chamber!"

"You stand beside me as an angel, Emily!" said the Earl fondly, "as you have ever been: yet I now

feel as though my eyes had not really seen and known you !”

They were slowly walking to and fro, the Earl affectionately supporting her tall slim figure ; and as he gazed at her, though her eyes were heavy with weeping, and her features partly concealed beneath her dark dishevelled tresses, he beheld in them a beauty which he had never fully seen before, and which no one knew him familiarly enough even to have remarked to him !

“ Papa,” said she, at length, evidently with timorous reluctance in her manner ; “ Shall I offend you if”— She paused and glanced at him apprehensively.

“ No, Emily, sweet love ! you will not—you cannot now offend me,” said he, sighing deeply, and speaking very gravely, but affectionately. “ I know what is in your gentle heart—your earliest words this morning are still ringing in my ears. Can you believe and trust in me, now, my dear Emily ?”

“ Indeed, indeed, papa, I can !”

“ As you love me, then, do not, at present, speak to me on this dreadful affair. I know all that you would say : but—you do not, you cannot, you ought not, to know as much of this matter as I do. Remembering the solemn and fearful passage of Holy Writ which you have showed me, Emily, I declare to you I be-

lieve in my conscience, that there is no shadow of doubt about the guilt of Ayliffe! So said his judge, an able and merciful judge; so said the jury; so say the whole world! I could tell you of expressions of dreadful malice on his part, against me and my family: but why? why, my love, should I distress you, or harass myself?"

Lady Emily was going to speak—but he added,

"Suppose before he suffer the sentence of the law, he were to acknowledge that he did this awful deed: what then, Emily?"

"What mean you, dear papa?" said she faintly.

"Should his life be even *then* spared?—or should he die?"

"Oh! papa!" she murmured, after a pause, sighing heavily. "But," she added, "suppose he should not confess it, but die saying that he is innocent, and it should be so found afterwards? Would not that be awful, dearest papa?"

"My dear Emily, unfortunately few criminals suffer their just sentence, without falsely protesting innocence: were we to believe them against all proof positive of guilt, how could law or justice be administered?"

"But, forgive a word more, papa!—Suppose he should *really* die innocent?"

"My dear girl, that is, I own, a very shocking sup-

position; but you may speak of this again to me—I hear the sound of steps coming along the corridor.”

The Earl was right; in a few moments a servant gently opened the door, and announced that Captain Lutteridge had just arrived from the barracks, in great haste, and begged to be allowed immediately to see his Lordship on an important matter. The Earl started: and, after a few seconds’ angry pause, said, “Let him be shown hither.”

When the servant had withdrawn—“Emily,” said he, “this is a well-meaning, thick-headed soldier, who has occasioned me great distress by his folly and meddling; but after the message which he has sent, I am bound to see him. Away, my love—I hear steps at a distance—God bless thee! God bless thee!” He kissed her fondly—“Go through yonder door;” and Lady Emily ran to the private door, and in a moment more Captain Lutteridge entered and found the Earl alone.

“I fear your Lordship is ill,” said the Captain, approaching him.

“No, Sir; but I am harassed,” replied the Earl, who had resumed all his habitual cold haughtiness of manner: “and may I request the favour of being at once informed what is your urgent business with me?”

The Captain was, as usual, excessively irritated by the Earl's address, but was then conscious of being in no position to quarrel with, or resent it.

"I will to the point at once, my Lord; I am come to own myself, to have been just playing the part of an utter fool."

There was something in his quaint embarrassed manner, that instantly arrested the Earl's attention; and he listened with stern curiosity.

"Your Lordship may believe that as a gentleman, and having the honour of bearing his Majesty's commission, I would rather suffer death than willingly or knowingly break my word"—

"For Heaven's sake, Sir, proceed; Go on:" said the Earl, impatiently, observing Captain Lutteridge hesitate for a moment.

"Well, my Lord, yet so the matter is;—in a conversation had scarce an hour ago with Mr. Hylton, about this caitiff that is to die on Monday—I could submit to be shot for having to acknowledge that unadvisedly and in the heat of the very speech in which I was protesting to the contrary, out slipped the accursed word *duelling*."

"What, Sir!" exclaimed the Earl, starting out of his chair, and standing erect, gazing at Captain Lutteridge, in a kind of stupified silence.

“ Yes, my Lord, I am a man of few words, and those few, how foolish sometimes ! My Lord—I say—out jumped this thrice accursed word—duelling”—

“ Merciful heavens!—these people will assuredly kill me, between them all,” exclaimed the Earl, striking his forehead with his clenched hand. “ And what then, Sir ?” he presently inquired, desperately, but with the manner of one quite exhausted.

“ Nothing, my Lord,” replied the Captain.

“ How say you, Sir ? Are you trifling—bandying words with me ? What mean you, Sir, by—*nothing* ?”

“ My Lord, what I mean, say I ; what I say, that mean I,” replied Captain Lutteridge, doggedly.

The Earl glanced at him, for a moment, with an expression which prevented a somewhat fierce speech that the Captain was about making ; and then—

“ Have you any other business with me, Sir ?” inquired the Earl, with evidently suppressed fury.

“ None, my Lord—none, I thank my stars ;” replied the Captain, coolly.

“ Sir, I seem the sport of destiny—this day. Never felt I so humiliated. I wish you good day, Sir,” said the Earl.

“ You see, my Lord,” said the Captain, resolutely—
“ I am cool, your Lordship is not ; wherefore I overlook”—

The Earl rang his bell violently ; and stood in silence till a servant appeared ; on which his Lordship motioned the Captain to the door, with an air which was to that gallant person utterly intolerable.

“ This is your house, my Lord, and I have no right in it ; nay, I had no business here whatever, seeing I ought to have better understood the nature of the person living in it. For the present, my Lord, good day. But I pray you, by no means to forget the words which you have this day used to me, nor the manner in which, before your menial, you have presumed to dismiss a gentleman and an officer. Be assured that if your Lordship be disposed to obliviousness hereof, I am not.”

With this the Captain made a low and very formal bow, and with slow dignified steps withdrew.

If he imagined that his last words had had the least effect on Lord Milverstoke, he was mistaken ; for his Lordship was sunk deep in a reverie with which the name and threats of Captain Lutteridge had no connexion whatever. And, indeed, as for the Captain himself, something occurred a few moments after his exit from the Earl's library, which made him for awhile forget the only as yet unavenged insult which he had ever experienced in his life. For he happened to encounter Lady Emily, who, unexpectedly to herself,

crossed his path on her way to Lady Alkmond's apartment, and disappeared in a moment.

"By my sword," said the Captain to himself, as he hurried on, "what a beauty is that girl, already! And in two years' time—heigho—nought will be heard at Court but of her. But, if she hath a temper like her father's—why, Heaven pity him that is captivated by her."

When the Captain was fairly on his way back to the barracks, his first stinging recollection of the treatment which he had experienced from the Earl, made him scratch his ear violently, and then dig his spurs into his startled but obedient horse, who thereupon pelted onward with him, till suddenly reined up, on its rider meeting another horseman—and that was Mr. Hylton, on his way home from Mr. Melcombe's.

"Sir, good day. Are you going to the Castle? Ecod, if you be, look out. You will be clean eaten up in one minute. Look out, therefore, is all I shall say, that am just escaped to tell you."

"Why, Captain, what is the matter, eh?"

"Matter? Egad, go and see, if you be so minded; for I'll be —— hem! I ask your pardon, Sir, you being a parson—good day, Sir."

"But stay—stay, Captain! Am I to go to the Castle? To see Lord Milverstone?"

“ Oh, certainly !” said the Captain, smiling grimly. “ Go and put your head into the lion’s mouth for a moment. You *may* come out again, and if you do, blessed be the stars that will shine on Mr. Hylton—good day, good day, Sir !”—and away rode the Captain, leaving Mr. Hylton in a perplexed, whom he had found in a very melancholy, mood : for Mr. Hylton had quitted Mr. Melcombe without having scarcely a ray of hope left on behalf of the unhappy convict for whom he had so powerfully but (as he now feared) unavailingly exerted himself. While he and Mr. Melcombe had been in the midst of their anxious consultation on the course to be pursued, Mr. Hylton’s attention was called by his companion to a person just then passing along the street, into which the window of Mr. Melcombe’s office looked, and who was no other than old Ayliffe, in his broad hat, long thread-bare blue coat, and high walking-stick, on his way from the gaol. Oh, what a face was his ! wasted, and full of sorrow and resignation ! And his step seemed feebler than Mr. Hylton had before observed it to be. He heaved a deep sigh while gazing after the venerable figure of one whom he did not venture, and had not the heart, to summon into the apartment in which his son’s welfare was the sole subject of discourse and consultation. Mr. Hylton told Mr. Melcombe, with a very depressed

air, that he had accidentally discovered what had been the topic of conversation at the Earl of Milverstoke's table, at the moment of Lord Alkmond's quitting it; but that it had become known to him in a manner which at present prevented his making any use of what he had heard; yet that he was able to assure Mr. Melcombe, that the conversation threw no light whatever on the gloomy affair, and, indeed, appeared quite incapable of being, in any intelligible or probable way, brought to bear upon it. Mr. Melcombe looked blank enough on hearing this.

"Then I fear *the game is up*, Mr. Hylton—if you will forgive the expression," said Mr. Melcombe, shrugging his shoulders, and sighing. Mr. Hylton only shook his head. "Can't you give me—I mean, are not you at liberty to give one the least inkling,—just a hint—a mere breath—eh? I would receive it in sacred confidence"—

"On no earthly consideration," replied Mr. Hylton, sadly. "My lips are sealed, till I see one from whom I accidentally learnt what I know. But this I can tell you: certain am I that there is something or other strange and mysterious about Lord Alkmond's fate, unconnected though it may be, with the facts proved against the prisoner."

"Does the intelligence which you have thus become

possessed of, in any way vary your view of the facts proved at the trial?" After some moments, during which Mr. Hylton rapidly ran over them, he answered in the negative.

"Does it bear at all on the new facts laid before the Secretary of State, as mentioned in my agent's letter?" Again Mr. Hylton paused, and longer than before.

"I cannot say that it does; nor will I say that it does not."

"The way to try the question fairly is, to put yourself in my Lord Farnborough's place, and ask yourself whether what you now know warrants you in further suspending the execution of this sentence."

"Of course, acting only on the knowledge which he would then have of the case, I mean, independently of my own unshaken conviction of the prisoner's innocence?"

"Of course; most certainly. You see, Mr. Hylton, my Lord Farnborough has a tremendous responsibility upon him, and must rest his discretion on sure grounds. What conclusion, then, on these principles, ought Lord Farnborough to arrive at—as the case now stands—and supposing him informed of that which you say that you now are?"

"Oh, do not ask me!" replied Mr. Hylton, gloomily.

"Is it information likely to bring you at all into

communication with the Earl of Milverstoke? What effect will it have on him if he know it?—Have we any chance of getting from his Lordship an expression of doubt of the prisoner's guilt, or a recommendation to mercy?" Again Mr. Hylton paused; turning over in his mind the possible result of Captain Lutteridge's interview that day with Lord Milverstoke; and having done so, shook his head, and sighed.

"Well, mystery! mystery all! all is mystery!" exclaimed Mr. Melcombe, shrugging his shoulders: "my duties seem a farce at present. We are walking in a fog, a blinding fog;" but, thought he, I see through that fog the dim, ghastly outline of a gallows! "My real opinion," he continued, "is that you have done all that can be done; and this unhappy fellow must be left to his fate. But, by the way, Mr. Hylton, you must needs answer the Home Secretary's letter, and without delay. I never read a letter at once so courteous, so solemn, so exacting of an answer. As a gentleman, as a Christian, you are bound to be promptly candid in this matter, and relieve his Lordship from the harassing doubts which it is you only who have raised in his mind."

"'Tis true, Mr. Melcombe; I feel the pressure of your words," said Mr. Hylton; "and if possible I will write by this night's coach; but I must first see or hear

from Lord Milverstoke; and so have not"—looking at his watch—"a moment's time to lose. Pray, come over to the parsonage to-morrow morning." And with this Mr. Hylton took his leave of Mr. Melcombe, grievously depressed, and, indeed, reduced well nigh to downright despair. He was conscious of fearing to contemplate the scattered fragments of the structure of hope which he had raised with such well-meant precipitation. He felt, indeed, sick at heart. Not all the endearments of good Mrs. Hylton could cheer his drooping spirits for a moment. He began now to afflict himself on account of having only protracted the mortal anguish of Ayliffe, and—in language terrible to be recollected—made him suffer twice the pangs of death. Little thought he of the angel who, in the form of Lady Emily, had that day joined her passionate advocacy with his! Her gentle hand had struck a blow that reached a long ice-bound heart, whence suddenly gushed upon her streams of pent-up love and tenderness, as from a source never, perchance, to be dried up again: but had that dear, noble creature succeeded in over-ruling her father's JUDGMENT? In his sudden condescension towards one whom he rightly regarded as, in such a matter, but a child, had he not shown a glimpse of reasoning, adverse to her wishes, which was not to be answered?

Of all this Mr. Hylton knew nothing ; and, in forming the resolution to go that evening to the Castle, ascertain the state of his Lordship's feelings on the subject, and make one last, earnest effort to shake his confidence in the prisoner's guilt, and persuade him to join in a recommendation to mercy, Mr. Hylton felt himself at once discharging a duty, and exercising a right.

CHAPTER VII.

SHORTLY after arriving at the parsonage, Mr. Hylton partook of a slight and hasty dinner : and then, taking with him the letter of Mr. Melcombe's London agent, and the Under Secretary of State's letter to himself, set off for the Castle, with heavy forebodings, when he adverted to the ominous intimations with which Captain Lutteridge had that day left him. Mr. Hylton's courage was not at fault ; and in a cause which he believed to be righteous and just, he would have faced the bloodiest tyrant that ever earth had seen and shuddered at. He would not else have been a true servant of his Master ; whose awful words should be ever sounding in our ears, subduing vain fears, and strengthening feeble purposes (and so they ever were with Mr. Hylton) :—*I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that, have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear Him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ;* YEA, I SAY UNTO YOU, FEAR HIM. “So,” said Mr. Hylton within himself, as he

went to pay probably his last visit, in Ayliffe's lifetime, to the Lord of Milverstoke, "do I verily in my conscience believe, as said the Judge to the jury in this poor man's case, that Adam Ayliffe is, in spite of all appearances against him, innocent of the crime for which he is adjudged to die?" And after a brief and serious revolving of the matter, he answered, "Yes, I do: then will I make this last effort, and if it fail, console myself by reflecting that what I thought my duty, I have done, careless of consequences."

Having come to this conclusion, he felt a wonderful composure of feeling, and serenity of spirit, which deserted him not for a moment—even when he entered the room in which Lord Milverstoke awaited him, and which had been the scene of their former agitating interview. He expected to see the Earl with a fierce and scowling countenance, and hear him speak in a voice of bitter contemptuousness, if not even roused into fury ungovernable. But Lord Milverstoke received him with marvellous calmness of manner, albeit with visible gloom.

"Pray Mr. Hylton, be seated," said his Lordship, with a sort of solemn courtesy that sensibly affected Mr. Hylton. "I am far from well, in either mind or body, but doubtless you have that to say which I ought

to hear, and at once, therefore, Sir, speak freely. I am all attention."

"Your Lordship has to-day seen Captain Lutteridge," said Mr. Hylton, resolved to take advantage of this unexpectedly calm humour of the Earl, and touch first the most dangerous topic that he knew he should have to deal with.

"I have, Sir. He told me what had passed between you and him this day. Captain Lutteridge is a plain-spoken gentleman, and somewhat abruptly broke to me a matter very painful: and I fear I dismissed him roughly, for which I am sorry; and request you, if you should see him, to tell him this from me."

"I trust your Lordship is satisfied that I had taken no means whatever to betray the Captain into this."

"He did not say that you did, Mr. Hylton, nor suggest it; and I believe that you could not possibly do so base and paltry a thing. And now that you know what formed the subject of conversation at my table, on that—that—hideous night—let me ask you, Sir, whether you agree with what I told you some time ago, that what was said on that night could have no bearing on the case which you have thought proper so vehemently, so tenaciously, to advocate and uphold?"

"My Lord, I feel it my duty to acknowledge that I have been unable hitherto to see any means of con-

necting that conversation with the event which we all do so deeply deplore; which still seems to me enshrouded in mystery and terror. But I am unshaken in my belief of the innocence of Ayliffe"—

"I feel it, Sir, very difficult to listen to you with calmness; but I restrain my feelings; and I request to be informed of your object in coming hither to-night."

"My Lord, I deem it right to show your Lordship how at present stands the case, which now probably can have only one ending on Monday morning next." Here he took out of his pocket-book two letters, and handing them to his Lordship, said, "The first, my Lord, is one which gives an account of what took place before the Secretary of State, with reference to the communication forwarded from Dunkirk; and the second is the Under Secretary's letter to me on the subject on which I have just spoken to your Lordship."

The Earl took the proffered document, and opened first the latter, with visibly checked eagerness; reading it over in silence. "I will not," said his Lordship, when he had come to the end, "ask you, Sir, whether *now* you feel justified in having made the representations which have called forth this very marvellous and creditable dispatch; for such I suppose I must call it. But if you have no objection to be so communicative, Sir, I wish to know what course you may now be intending to

pursue. I mean, speaking with precision, how you will endeavour to make it appear that you have not disturbed the administration of justice."

"Oh, my Lord, while I acknowledge the courtesy of your Lordship's language, I feel the searing severity of your rebuke, and must submit to it. But while I do so, suffer me to say, that my conscience acquits me of having done, intentionally, wrong. I acted in a great, a very terrible difficulty."

"I think, Sir, you evade—no, Sir, I beg your pardon—I mean, I think that you did not hear, or have forgotten, my question. I ask you again, what course you intend to pursue, with reference to this letter? You pause, Mr. Hylton. If it be any relief to your feelings, I have to inform you, that I shall myself immediately write to my Lord Farnborough, telling him how I am forced, by circumstances, to disclose a conversation which took place in the fancied privacy of my own house. I shall also mention the subject of that conversation;"—he paused, and involuntarily closed his eyes for a moment—"and that—my—unfortunate murdered son was present, and probably heard what was said; and shortly afterwards left the Castle. This I intend to do, Sir, immediately: and then, Sir, I presume your end will have been so far answered," said the Earl, momentarily resuming his usual sternness of tone

and manner. Mr. Hylton bowed in silent acquiescence.

“And what inference do you think proper, Sir, to draw from this circumstance, touching my unhappy son’s murder?” the Earl proceeded, with ill-subdued vehemence, and a voice in which a faint tremor was perceptible.

“My Lord,” replied Mr. Hylton calmly, “I profess to draw no inferences. I know not that I am entitled to draw any, nor that I am able to do so.”

“This babbling Captain told you, Sir, I believe, that the late Lord Alkmond seemed disturbed—distressed—at the conversation?”

“Certainly he did, my Lord.”

“And of course, Sir, you placed implicit reliance on what he said? and were ready to act on what a man in his cups fancied that he observed in another? But I cannot pursue this further, Sir,” said the Earl, having slightly changed colour. “And now concerning this other letter.”

That also his Lordship read entirely through. When he had done, he said, with a contemptuous air, “It did not require Lord Farnborough’s talents to dispose of *this* flimsy farce. But are *you* satisfied on this point also, Sir?”

“My Lord, I cannot carry the matter further, and

look upon it, after the two letters which your Lordship has before you, as concluded ; or at least placed beyond *my* judgment or responsibility."

" And *what then*, Sir ?" inquired Lord Milverstoke, eyeing Mr. Hylton steadfastly.

" What then, my Lord, indeed !" echoed Mr. Hylton, with a deep sigh.

" I will tell you, Sir. Justice will be satisfied, and a lesson taught to those who have striven to defeat it."

" My Lord, pardon me, I cannot sit silent while"—

" I tell you, Sir, that you must and shall sit silent before him whom you have so deeply injured, whose feelings you have outraged, whose heart you have wrung, whose very soul you have tortured almost to very madness. I tell you, Sir, that you have acted in vain and presumptuous defiance of common sense, the law of the land, and the principles of justice ; and most advisedly stabbed hearts into which it was your province rather to have poured sympathy and consolation. How, Sir, shall you ever make me amends for the days and nights of misery which your intrusive meddling and false humanity have occasioned me ? Was your object, Sir, to hold me up as a mark for the arrows of calumny ? To earn for yourself the reputation of the good and merciful, at my expense, coarsely careless of the peace of

my family? To make me appear, I say, vindictive and relentless, that you might appear the reverse? But, doubtless, you have been partially successful; and I beg of you to spend an early day next week, a *very* early day, Sir, in humiliation and fasting, that you may acquire a smarting sense of your inhumanity, and possibly even learn a little humility, and to place less confidence in your own somewhat overweening and presumptuous judgment! Oh, let me hear, Sir, what you have to say! By all means, Mr. Hylton; plausibility will not even now desert you!" said the Earl, with a most bitter smile, it being the first approach—but such an one!—to a smile of any kind, that had been seen in his features since his son's death.

"My Lord, I see before me, in your Lordship, only a cruelly injured and bereaved father; your Lordship sees in me only an humble Clergyman, unable, and indisposed, even where he able, to resent insult, or *render railing for railing*. I dare not, I cannot, take or feel offence at anything that has fallen from your Lordship; and I believe that though sharp and cutting are your words, your Lordship meant not offence against one who never uttered a disrespectful or hasty word to your Lordship; who at this moment, God be my witness, loves and pities your Lordship"—

"I thank you, Sir," interposed the Earl, loftily.

—“And sympathizes with your sufferings. But, my Lord, I choose to appeal for a moment, calmly and confidently, to your own high feelings. I call upon you to remember my sacred character and office, and to bear with me while I solemnly denounce, in the name of Him whom I serve, your present fierce, unchristian, unhumbled spirit.”

“Mr. Hylton,” said the Earl, his eyes glistening with fury, “I would be calm and temperate with you, in spite of your provoking me to forget what is due to myself, as well as you. Pray, Sir, exercise, in your amazing meekness!—a little discretion; and consider whether you are not guilty of inordinate assumption in thus addressing him whom you have injured, and towards whom you express no single word of regret or apology!”

“For what, my Lord, am I to apologise?” inquired Mr. Hylton, mildly.

“If your own heart do not tell you, Sir, words of mine are unavailing. And now that you have, perhaps, no fresh indignity to offer me under the guise of saintly counsel and rebuke”—Mr. Hylton gazed earnestly at the Earl, but evidently with no intention to interrupt him, and with a look which made the Earl falter for a second or two—“let me, in my unworthy turn, presume to offer *you* some advice; to

give you, Sir, a recommendation, and methinks a very solemn one. To the prison, Sir—to the cell of the justly doomed betake yourself, and make efforts, which I would fain hope may not even yet be unavailing, to repair the almost mortal mischief that you have done! Try, Sir, to turn the guilty eye which is there, *again* to hereafter—that eye which you have diverted fatally to earth. Calm *that* spirit! Collect *those* wandering and distracted thoughts! Clear away the confusion that you have *there* created! Be *this*, Reverend Sir, for some few days to come, your terrible task!”

“I have not, my Lord, your Lordship’s known eloquence, your powers of blighting sarcasm—gifts from God, for wise purposes, towards yourself and others, and not weapons to be thus used against an unoffending, though most unworthy, servant of that Great Giver! who is Lord of Lords, and King of Kings! Oh, my Lord! my Lord! to that condemned cell, my steps shall, indeed, soon be bent! Its poor occupant shall have my fervent prayers, my most affectionate offices! I will prostrate by his side my own unworthy soul before the awful throne of God, now, I humbly trust, brightening before his eye, from which are falling away the films of earth. I will try, unscathed by your causeless curse, to lift up those trembling hands, and support those feeble knees: and oh! my God! for His sake, who

died the just for the unjust, assist my efforts on that occasion; and before he go hence, may he declare his forgiveness of those who express no forgiveness towards him!"

No man living could have then seen and heard Mr. Hylton unmoved: what dignity, and tenderness, were in his every look, his every word! The Earl gazed at him in silence as he spoke; and when he paused, said, with some effort to retain his former sternness of tone, "Sir, this is very eloquent and moving, and quite in the style of your profession, Sir!—but endeavour to be just. Have I said, Sir, that I would extend no forgiveness towards this unhappy wretch?"

"*Do you feel that you can, my Lord?*" inquired Mr. Hylton, and his eye seemed to search the soul of Lord Milverstoke; whose wasted and agitated features were suddenly flushed, but he spoke not: "one word—one such word, my Lord, from those *truthful* lips of yours would be indeed"—

"Are you my confessor, Sir?" presently inquired Lord Milverstoke sternly.

"No, my Lord, I am not; but still one who, till I may be dismissed, am intrusted with sacred functions towards your Lordship and your household. I charge you, my Lord, by your hope of eternal life and hap-

piness, passing through the forgiveness of injury—I charge you, my Lord, to give me authority, on your behalf, to tell this”—

“Let not my name be mentioned, Sir, in that place of guilt and pollution!” said the Earl with great excitement: “by what authority, Sir, do you presume thus to talk to me? to tell me that you are entitled to ask me such a question? If, between my God and myself, Sir, I endeavour to do my duty towards Him and towards man; who, Sir, shall interfere? Sir, you still *are*, at present, one of my Chaplains, and I forbear; but you will find it prudent to pursue these topics no further.”

Mr. Hylton bowed with sad respectfulness. “I ask your Lordship to bear with me—possibly for the last time that I may be seen, or my voice be heard, within your Lordship’s residence—in your Lordship’s presence. Reverse, for a moment, the case that is now, my Lord; and suppose that Adam Ayliffe had been the murdered man, and your Lordship unjustly accused as the murderer, and doomed to die, though innocent—to be ignominiously hanged, my Lord—your big, proud heart bursting indignantly amidst universal but undeserved execration”—

“Why, Sir, will you exercise your rhetorical powers upon *me*? I have acknowledged your eloquence; I

add to it, if it gratify you, that you are a master of your art; you display powers, Sir, that I never dreamed of your possessing; and, to show you the gross injustice of your accusation against me, if ever it be in my power to contribute towards placing your talents in a more conspicuous position—of usefulness, I mean, Sir—I will pledge myself to do it. Yes, Sir, heartily, zealously—from motives unimpeachable by God or man. Is not *that* a forgiveness of injury? For, Sir, I tell you that I bear an almost intolerable sense of the injury you have done me—which you continue to do me—injury with which you are now mingling *insult*!—insult, Sir—bitter insult! For I now feel that you are absurdly striving to practise upon my feelings! and to trifle with my understanding! Yes, I do, Sir,” added the Earl, darting a furious glance at Mr. Hylton.

“Forgive me, my Lord Milverstoke; you cannot have calmly arrived at that conclusion; and you are wronging yourself, and not me! Oh, my Lord, my Lord, my question remains unanswered! Your expressions of intended good towards *me*, I am constrained to receive with implicit credence: but I ask no forgiveness for myself; it is for”—

“Pshaw, Sir! Now, let me remind you of a passage that you know well—Why see you the mote that

is in my eye, and not the beam that is in your own? 'Tis almost descending to the ridiculous, Sir; but it is you who force that descent—you, oracle of humility in others! see with what tenacious conceit and pride you refuse to own *your* faults, and proudly disclaim a proffered forgiveness!"

"God must judge between us, my Lord," said Mr. Hylton, with a sigh. "I am not conscious of feeling what you impute to me."

"That, Sir, I believe," interposed the Earl, scornfully; "and now we understand each other!"

"But if aught in me—my speech, my manner, aught that I have said, that I have done—have given offence, I ask your Lordship's forgiveness most sincerely, and thankfully will receive it."

"You have it, Sir."

"And now, my Lord"—

"Pursue that subject no further, Sir," interrupted the Earl, "lest you should clean provoke me out of all patience. I know what you would repeat and re-iterate. Would you not be well pleased to see me accompany you, and present myself with you in the cell of—of"—the Earl stopped, shuddering, and recoiling from the presence which he had conjured up.

"If you even did, my Lord, it might stand you in stead hereafter, before the awful bar of God, when you,

and I, and this your abhorred and despised fellow-man, are standing to receive our final and irrevocable judgment." As Mr. Hylton said this, he dropped his head involuntarily, and spoke in a very thrilling tone as he continued—"There, also, will stand one who, could he now speak from amidst the silence of the grave, would say only—*Forgive*: in his name, my Lord, I"—

"Oh, you presumptuous, horrible, and most barbarous person!" exclaimed Lord Milverstoke, starting up, his features flushed, his eyes glaring with fearful expression at Mr. Hylton; "is the grave not sacred from your vile profaning touch, your polluting presence?"—he walked to and fro, apparently almost gasping for breath. "Leave the room, Sir!—leave me!—never let my eyes light on you again!—you, whose miscreant hand would pluck out my heart, and trample upon it and the mangled body of my son together!—out upon you!"

"May God forgive me, my Lord, if"—

"Silence! A word, Sir, and you drive me to madness!" The Earl stood still for a few moments, pressing both his hands upon his head. "And all this—all this—to save"—he gasped—"from the gallows—a wretch—a blood-stained wretch.—Look you, Sir! look! So let him perish!" and rushing forward towards the table, on which stood a large and costly lamp, he struck

it down with phrenzied violence, and they were instantly in darkness. "Begone, Sir!"

"I go, my Lord; and so may not you go, hereafter, into UTTER DARKNESS! Amen! Oh God! Amen!" exclaimed Mr. Hylton, at the same time slowly groping his way towards the door, and along the wall near which he had been standing.

"Begone! Messenger of Satan, sent to buffet me!" cried the Earl, with hoarse vehemence, stamping his foot furiously on the floor; and when Mr. Hylton had nearly reached the door, and was considering whether he should make one more effort before quitting the Castle for ever, he heard a loud groan issue from the Earl, and then a sound as of one falling heavily.

Mr. Hylton hastily opened the door, and, with marvellous presence of mind, avoided calling out for assistance, lest he should fatally alarm Lady Alkmond, whose apartments were, though at some distance, in that quarter of the Castle. With as little disturbance as was possible under the circumstances, assistance was soon procured for the Earl, the library within a few minutes' time being crowded with servants and others, who, it may easily be imagined, were fearfully shocked on entering the darkened room, where they found on one side of the library table the Earl stretched insensible on the floor, and on the other the scattered frag-

ments of the lamp which he had, in his sudden phrenzy, destroyed. Happily medical aid was instantly at hand. The physician resident in the Castle, in attendance upon Lady Alkmond, expressed no surprise at the illness of the Earl, whom he had known to be for some time in a state of considerable excitement, and who had during that very day complained to him of indisposition. It could not be for some little time pronounced whether Lord Milverstoke was suffering from an attack of apoplexy; but the remedies applied had reference to such an alarming visitation, and he was profusely bled on the spot, and then carried to bed; a messenger being immediately dispatched for the attendance of the consulting physician, resident in the county town, and a person of great skill and eminence. Mr. Hylton stayed for some time, in such a state of anxiety and distress as seemed likely, combined with his own long-continued excitement and fatigue, to precipitate him also into serious illness. To the amazed and troubled inquiries of those whom he had summoned into the room, Mr. Hylton answered merely that the Earl had been engaged up to almost the last moment in very anxious conversation on the subject of recent events, and especially upon one that was to take place within a few days. Fortunately, he was not asked how they came to be in darkness, and the lamp

broken upon the ground ; and it was very naturally supposed that the lamp might have been overthrown accidentally in the hurried movements of Mr. Hylton in obtaining assistance. As calmly as he could, under circumstances of such an agitating kind as those which had happened just previously to his quitting the Castle, he considered, on his ride homeward, what course was now proper to be adopted with reference to answering the inquiries which the Secretary of State had directed to be addressed to him. As he conceived it requisite that no time should be lost, he hastened homeward ; and in time for dispatch by that night's mail, which passed at midnight through the village, he addressed the following letter to the Under Secretary of State :—

“ Parsonage, Milverstoke.

“ Sir,

“ I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 15th instant, and to express the deep sense which I entertain of Lord Farnborough's anxiety to see justice done in a case which I humbly conceive (however erroneously) to be one of peculiar difficulty and responsibility. I made the representations to the Lord Chief Justice, which were substantially of the nature mentioned in your letter, under a deep sense of the responsibility which at-

tached to me in making them. I have now to inform my Lord Farnborough that, after great efforts, and partly through an accident, I have discovered the nature of the occurrence which immediately preceded Lord Alkmond's departure from the Castle to the wood. It consisted of a conversation, merely among some of the guests left at the table, after Lord Milverstoke and others had quitted it, Lord Alkmond remaining behind. A topic was casually introduced which led to rather animated conversation, and which was observed to be extremely disagreeable, and even painful, to Lord Alkmond, who took no part in it; and, finding it persevered in, quitted the room, and was not seen afterwards alive by any of the guests at the Castle. The gentleman who first told me of this circumstance was one of those who dined at the Castle on that occasion; and hearing, after the trial of this case, of a remark which had fallen from the Lord Chief Justice, sent for me, and told me of the fact of this conversation, but declined mentioning what was the subject of it, until he should have received my Lord Milverstoke's permission. I have just quitted the Castle; where, I lament to say, that while I was with his Lordship, he was seized with sudden—and possibly, I fear, serious—illness; such as will probably render it impossible for his Lordship to

do what he explicitly declared to me that it was his intention to do to-morrow—namely, to write and inform my Lord Farnborough, that the conversation in question was on the subject of *duelling*. I conceive, under the special circumstances of the case, that I am justified in making this disclosure, to which I trust Lord Farnborough will give no publicity, unless it be deemed absolutely necessary for the ends of justice. I feel bound in candour to state, that after very anxious reflection during this day, I am at a loss to suggest any probable connection between the happening of this conversation and the perpetration of the murder; nor have I, at present, any reason to believe that more light can be thrown on the subject, notwithstanding the possibility of the fact proving to be otherwise, were further time allowed for inquiry. And I must add, that the Earl of Milverstone has repeatedly and most explicitly stated to me, that he knew no reason whatever for Lord Alkmond's being agitated by such a conversation as that above mentioned; and could not conjecture what bearing it could have upon the horrible murder of the late lamented Lord Alkmond.

“I have been made aware of what passed before Lord Farnborough, and in your own presence, relating to this matter. I have no new facts or suggestions to

offer on this subject, which I must now finally leave in the hands of his Lordship, under the direction of a superintending Providence. I cannot, however, abstain from adding, that my own conviction of the prisoner's innocence, remains unshaken; but, at the same time, I cannot deny the strength of the case against him, if regarded solely with reference to the facts established at the trial.

“I have the honour to be, Sir,

“Your obedient servant,

“HENRY HYLTON.”

“The Hon. H. J. C. Wylmington.”

“Alas, Adam! my poor friend! I fear all is over! I have done my best—but, I fear, in vain,” were the words with which, on the ensuing morning, Mr. Hylton led into his library old Ayliffe, who had come down to learn the final result of Mr. Hylton's benevolent exertions; having walked for that purpose all the way from the county town where his son lay awaiting death. Ayliffe clasped his hands together in silence, and looked unutterable things at Mr. Hylton, who seemed unable to bear the misery that gleamed upon him from those penetrating blue eyes, the expression of which he had, in happier days, so often admired.

“Then he must die!” faintly exclaimed the old

man, after awhile, his eyes never having wandered for even an instant from those of Mr. Hylton; who only shook his head, in sad affirmance of Ayliffe's words. "Oh! let me return to my son!" said the old man, slowly rising. "Adam! my son! my son! would God I might die with thee! How we could uphold one another in passing through the waters! Will you not pray for us, Sir, that God would be with us in this bitter hour?"

"Ay, my poor brother; let us kneel before Him who will see, and hear, and answer us, though it may not be as we would at this moment desire."

Mr. Hylton gently assisted Ayliffe to his knees, (for he appeared bewildered, though he had spoken calmly,) and sinking on his own, with faltering voice addressed a short and fervent prayer to the Almighty, that he would vouchsafe support to those who reverently strove, whether living or dying, to yield themselves to His sovereign will in all things.

"The blessing of an old man, fatherless, be upon thee and thine, thou Minister of God!" said Ayliffe, when they had risen from their knees; and his countenance, voice, and gesture seemed, as he spoke, scarcely to be of this world.

"Amen, Adam! Amen!" said Mr. Hylton, grasping his hands affectionately.

“Is it fixed that my son die on Monday?” inquired Ayliffe, with dreadful calmness.

“It is—alas! it is!” replied Mr. Hylton: “I see now no earthly means whatever of delaying the day, or preventing the execution of the law.”

“Friday! — Saturday! — Sunday!” said Ayliffe, gazing intently at Mr. Hylton.

“Yes, Adam; three days! only three! How important are they!”

“And then my son is no more on earth! Let me go to my son! I stay too long from him!” The old man rose from his seat, and, walking slowly to the door, taking his hat in one hand, and his staff in the other, exclaimed, as if to himself, “Adam! Adam! I am coming to thee!”

“How go you, Adam, my dear friend? have you any conveyance thither?” inquired Mr. Hylton, earnestly. His words seemed for a moment to rouse his unhappy companion.

“God will guide me. If he do not give me strength, I faint by the way; for truly, truly, Sir, my heart is very faint, and my knees tremble!”

“Remain a moment, till my return,” said Mr. Hylton, hurriedly—and presently returned, accompanied by Mrs. Hylton, who, in tearful silence, assisted her husband in pouring out a glass of wine,

which the old man took with thankfulness, his hand trembling the while; and observing Mrs. Hylton in tears, he shook his head mournfully, attempting to speak to her, but his lips uttered no audible sound. At that moment their little daughter timidly approached the door, and, entering the room, stole beside her mother, gazing around her apprehensively and in silence. Then the old man's feelings gave way, as he looked at her; the tears forced themselves down his cheeks; he shook his head for some time, evidently struggling for speech; and at length said in a faint voice, "The Lord bless thee, little one!"

"Lay thy hands upon her, Adam, and give her thy blessing, thou suffering saint!" said Mr. Hylton: and gently placing his daughter before the old man, he put his hands upon her head, and solemnly and tremulously repeated his words, "The Lord bless thee! Amen!"

Shortly afterwards he quitted the parsonage, and would not hear of any assistance being provided to enable him to return. Mr. Hylton pledged himself to visit the unhappy convict, if possible, on that very day; "Though I tell you, Adam, it will be a far sorer trial to me than I can well bear. I trust, however," continued Mr. Hylton, with emotion, "your

poor son is satisfied that I have not lightly lengthened his sufferings."

"Oh, Sir! Reverend Sir! if it were lawful for man to bow to man, my poor Adam would fall on his knees before you, and even kiss the dust off your feet!"

"Let him receive me calmly, Adam, I entreat thee; or I may not be able to discharge the solemn office which I shall go to perform—to administer such counsel as God may enable me. Farewell, now, Adam, for a while; and tell your son, if I be not with him before you, that I am coming; that I will not—I cannot—desert him."

Within a few hours afterwards Mr. Hylton, after a very melancholy ride thither, entered the gaol, and took an opportunity, before going to the condemned cell, of seeing the Chaplain—an excellent person, most exemplary in the discharge of his gloomy duties at the prison, and who had been unremitting in his attentions to Ayliffe. The first words uttered by the Chaplain concerning Ayliffe, not a little agitated Mr. Hylton.

"Poor soul!" said the Chaplain, "he is about to ask you to use your influence, as a magistrate, with the authorities (I told him that I knew it would be in vain), that, when he has suffered, his body may not be given over to be anatomized, but be buried in your

churchyard, in the same grave with his mother, and that you will bury him."

"I—I—cannot, then, see the unhappy man to-day! My feelings are already overpowered. I am quite unfit to discharge the duty which I came to endeavour to do," said Mr. Hylton; and his disturbed countenance and gestures confirmed what he said. "Is his father with him?"

"No; he has not yet returned from Milverstoke. He was to have seen you, and asked you, in his son's name, to do what I have just mentioned."

"He *has* been with me," said Mr. Hylton, almost in tears; "but his heart must have failed him: he said not a word to me on the dismal subject."

"That old man is piety personified. His reverent submission to the will of God, in this awful dispensation of his Providence, has made all my own past teachings, my dear friend, seem poor and ineffectual. His image is ever before my eyes—his voice, solemn and calm, ever sounding in my ears. I sit, in spirit, at his feet!"

"And his son: does he waver in asserting his innocence?"

"No, not for a moment: he is firm as at the first—declaring his belief that, when too late, it will be shown that the deed was done by others, and that he knew

nothing of it whatever. Once he showed unusual emotion on the subject, and, drawing himself up with an air of true dignity, if ever dignity I saw in man, exclaimed, 'No murder could I do at all; but least of all could I strike, coward-like, from behind. When I think of *that*, and that people can believe Adam Ayliffe, an Englishman, did so, I feel as though my heart would clean burst for shame and anger!'"

Mr. Hylton listened to this in agitated silence; for he could not speak.

"And, in truth," continued the Chaplain, "there is something noble in the poor fellow's features, and their expression is of a pure frankness, such as never, I am sure, masked the heart of a murderer. I have come to your conclusion; and I terribly fear that this man is going to suffer wrongfully. But what can be done? Who is to be blamed? Consider that the gloomy position which has hanged him, was sought out by himself; and, as we cannot see with God's eyes, human justice must do the best it can."

"I have, I think, satisfied Ayliffe that a fairer trial than he had, could not have been. I have said to him, 'Had you been a jurymen, as your father has several times been, and sworn on such a trial as yours, your verdict, on your oath, must have been Guilty:—and he was silent.'"

“In what state of feeling is he, now that his doom is unchangeably fixed?”

“Then it really *is* fixed?” inquired the Chaplain suddenly, and very gravely.

“I doubt no more that he will suffer on Monday, than that the sun will rise on that morning. Alas! I am too well able to express that conviction. I have left no stone unturned—have moved in high, nay, the highest places—in vain. Only last night there was a truly awful scene between Lord Milverstoke and me, the consequence of which I cannot foresee; for he was seized with a fit while I was with him, endeavouring, to the best of my ability, to induce upon him a Christian temper of forgiveness and mercy.”

“Is his Lordship, then, stern and implacable as ever?”

“Indeed, I fear he is; but God grant that, in my zeal, I may not have gone further than my duty warranted. My heart bleeds for his sufferings; so did it all the while I was with him. But, alas! his will is as iron, seemingly not softened by affliction.”

“Oh, what a contrast!—what a contrast to this old man Ayliffe! Before I leave you,” said the Chaplain, suddenly placing his hand on Mr. Hylton’s arm, and speaking with a very impressive air, “let me say, that you must attend the prisoner in his last hour—he will expect it—nay, I believe he will this day ask you.”

“Oh, my dear friend,” replied Mr. Hylton, rather faintly, “forgive me!—I pray you, cease! Surely sufficient for the day is the evil thereof!”

“True, my friend; but prepare you for the painful question: and therefore only do I mention it. And now you must lose no time, if you would be of service to the prisoner. You will find two Prayer-books in the cell; and will probably see the prisoner reading in the great old Bible of his father.”

“Adam! God be with you!” exclaimed Mr. Hylton, as soon as the turnkey had unlocked, unbarred, and thrown open the door of the cell.

Poor Ayliffe rose eagerly, the clanking of his heavy fetters sickening the very soul of his sorrowful visitor, whose hand he clasped convulsively, and then carried to his lips, but spoke not a word.

“Alas, Adam! I have only gloomy tidings for you, if you need to be told them: all hope is now utterly extinguished—the day of your departure is near at hand. I feel it a sacred duty to assure you, that on Monday morning—*on Monday morning, Adam*—the will of God will be accomplished on you. Then He who gave you life, will take it from you: He who placed you on earth, will remove you from it. May you, Adam Ayliffe, be ready for that tremendous change!”

Finding that Ayliffe was firmly grasping his hand, and sighing deeply, but apparently not suffering

violent emotion, Mr. Hylton, in a low earnest tone, continued to address him.

“Regard this transitory life, henceforth, as over: fled as a dream: gone as a shadow: yet leaving its traces in most awful responsibility on account of what has been done in that brief space, in that fleeting dream and passing shadow! Look upward! For that, is your spirit formed—of that, made capable. Be not disheartened,—be not presumptuous! It is fearful to look back on the long array of sins that you have committed, known only to God and yourself, to whom He may now have made many visible, that had before been forgotten! What sins wilfully committed, stifling the voice of conscience!—what myriad holy warnings disregarded! Let not the foul tempter and enemy of mankind, in these your last hours, deceive you: be prepared against him. He will strive, as striven I know he has, to tell you of great sins and little sins, and that none which you have committed do deserve this punishment which is inflicted upon you—nay, impiously will he tell you that this death which is coming on you is unjust!”—Here Ayliffe heaved a profound sigh, but made no attempt to speak. “Whether you die innocent of the crime for which the law of man has declared your life forfeit, God perfectly knoweth, as you cannot doubt; and if your conscience be herein

void of offence towards God and man, God forbid that such a consciousness should lead you down to destruction, by inciting profane and rebellious thoughts! Adam, as a servant of the living God, I earnestly warn you against this deadly snare and danger, and remind you that, as you cannot escape in anywise from the power of God Almighty, you must needs resign yourself into His hands, whose wisdom is unsearchable, infinitely past finding out, but also whose goodness and justice are perfect and absolute: and in this dispensation, which appears to you strange and unreasonable, yet in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—He could reveal most abundantly sufficient grounds and reasons for this His ordering. He may not choose to do so with you in this life, though possibly, when you are gone, He may vouchsafe to make plain all that now seems mysterious and confounding. And he may not choose now to show you a reason for what he doth with you, because he will have you thoroughly exercise your faith and obedience, as the condition of your immortal soul entering into happiness with Him, that can have no end. And, though you die innocent of this particular act charged against you, and so, in the language of men, die unjustly—(yet forget never that this evil overtook you when seeking revenge, and indulging malignity most utterly abhorrent to God,

and contrary to all religion)—yet, Adam! think of One who asked that, *if it were possible, the cup of agony and death might pass from Him*, yet submitted to the will of His Father, and knowing no sin, *died yet the just for the unjust!* Adam! let this thought kindle your spirit.”

“Oh, Sir! there—there are all my hopes: all is darkness but there! And when I am, though only for a moment, put off that thought and hope, I sink! and am quite undone!”

This Ayliffe said very earnestly, and in a way that greatly consoled and encouraged Mr. Hylton, who then spoke long and movingly to him of the glorious, but awful Presence in which they were; and brought before him the gracious promises, but also the strict conditions, of the Gospel. Poor Ayliffe’s answers told Mr. Hylton of the constant presence and teaching of old Ayliffe, whom Mr. Hylton likened to the guardian-angel of his son.

“And now, Adam, one question must I ask you, and the answer must be a true one, and it will tell at once whether your peace and hopes for hereafter be well or ill founded. Do you from your very heart and soul forgive all mankind—even those whom you think to have most grievously wronged you?”

“Ay, Sir, I do: God be thanked, I do!” replied

Ayliffe, quickly and heartily, and with such a heavenly smile on his features, that Mr. Hylton felt an indescribable awe in looking at him and listening to him.

“Do you forgive Lord Milverstoke?”

“Oh, Sir, why should I be angered with him? His son has been murdered, and he thinks that I did it! But he has done nothing of malice against me, who die according to law. Never in this case have I felt malice towards my Lord, so God be my witness!”

“There is another, Adam,” said Mr. Hylton, pointedly.

“I know, Sir, whom you mean—one that has truly been my enemy, and the foe of my father and me.”

“I mean Mr. Oxley, Adam.”

“I do clearly and perfectly forgive him, as I do hope myself to be forgiven; but I must say the truth, Sir; it has been a long and a hard business to do this—but God has heard prayer for me, and helped me to feel the forgiveness that I speak of; and I hope he will, when I am gone, bethink him of his unkindness towards those who never injured him, and were striving hard to live honestly, though near upon starving.”

“And yet, Adam Ayliffe, is there one other.”

“Oh, Sir, you speak of Hundle, that first led me

into all this. Whatever he has done against me I have forgiven—I do forgive! He was a cruel and deceitful man to me—but he must answer to God for it!”

“And have you, Adam—it is my duty to remind you—nothing to answer for against that man? With God, *intended* guilt is guilt—He sees into the heart!”

“I know it, Sir! I know it!” replied Ayliffe, with a contrite air. “I went out to lie in wait for him with foul ill-will: and Satan might have urged me further than I had meant; for I will own, Sir, that as I walked in that wood, waiting to see him, when I thought of him, these fingers tightened like a vice on my stick. Oh, Sir! a terrible business it might have been!”

“And all this, Adam, fully seen and known by Almighty God at the time! The forgiveness that you pray for must first be shown by you—there must not be one spark of animosity lurking in your heart, or it will pollute the whole beyond cleansing! And have you thus thoroughly forgiven?”

“Ay, ay, have I, God being my witness! and from the time I first felt that I had done so, I was a changed man; and even in these irons, felt for a while free and light-hearted! I have forgiven! I do—so may God forgive me!” said Ayliffe, with a look of such meek sincerity, that Mr. Hylton implicitly believed him, and said, very cheerfully—

“Why, Adam! God hath been with you! and He is with you, and will be with you!”

“So I do humbly believe and hope, Sir: yet, I feel oftentimes sharp and bitter pains and pangs, and fall into darkness. There’s one—nay, there be more, that I leave behind me—would that they went with me, if such were the will of God, and so were quit of a miserable world!”

“Beware of such thoughts, Adam! for they lead to unholy repinings and doubts. God may have good or evil in store for them; but only when He pleases will they go after you. In the course of nature, your good, your virtuous father must follow you, and it may not be long; but while he lives, surely you will be thankful that he is left here to watch, for a while, over those whom you love?”

“But, Sir, there is a thing that does cruelly trouble my poor soul: where is their bread to come from? Who is to work for them when I am gone? Oh, Sir! almost my last thoughts will be of that! My child is a poor, little, weak creature, and likely never to be able to stir for himself! Now would I cry, and would ever, when I think of him and Sarah: but cry I cannot! Tears will not come, though they might ease my heart, which feels hot and choked!”

“My poor friend! believe me when I assure you

that God has already raised up a friend for those whom you will leave behind you. Cast your care on Him who careth for you; those you love will not, shall not perish; they shall not come to want!"

Here Ayliffe put his hand into his bosom, and took out a small packet, neatly fastened with thread, and opened it. There were two small papers, and each contained a lock of hair.

"This is Sarah's, Sir: and this is Adam's," said he, and he gave such a sad, heart-broken look, first at them, and then at Mr. Hylton, that the latter's tears gushed out, and continued to do so for some moments.

"Ah, Sir," said Ayliffe, calmly, and sighing, "I wish my tears could come; but I am past it!" Then he folded up the little precious remembrances, and replaced them in his bosom. "Are these to be buried with me, Sir?" said he, with an ominous—a fearfully significant look at Mr. Hylton; who, remembering what the Chaplain had prepared him for, felt suddenly sick at heart.

"What answer can I give you, my poor friend?" inquired Mr. Hylton, in a low tone, looking down; and there was a dismal silence.

"Oh, Sir, cannot you, being a magistrate, beg off my poor body for burial? Some pangs it might save me, to think that I lay in the blessed earth of our

churchyard at Milverstoke, in my mother's grave—ah! you buried her, Sir.”

“I did, Adam—I did; may you soon meet her sainted spirit! and, oh! why care about the darkened dust that you leave behind you? If your *spirit* live for ever, in happiness”—

“Sir—good, kind Sir—I cannot help it! It is the nature that I am made of. My flesh creeps to think that—that this body”—he shuddered visibly from head to foot.

“Poor friend! your feelings I respect—I would have your wishes attended to; but, alas! I have no power whatever. It pains me to remind you, Adam, of the sentence”—

“Oh, I heard it, Sir!” said he, and seemed for a moment absorbed in a sickening recollection; “I know that so as my soul be right, little signifies it about my poor body; but I should not tell truth if I said this thing did not grieve—nay, fright me. How I do think of it, Sir! Do, Sir, *promise* to do what you can?”

“I promise to do my utmost endeavour.”

“Thank you, Sir!” he replied, with a deep sigh.

“And now I must leave you, Adam”—

He rose up suddenly, his irons rattling so as to startle Mr. Hylton. “Not—not for ever, Sir!” said

Ayliffe, with wild alarm in his face, stretching his arms towards Mr. Hylton.

“What do you mean?” inquired Mr. Hylton, faintly.

“Oh, Sir! good, dear, merciful Sir! do come to me again! I cannot die happy if I see you not again!”

“I will be with you again,” faltered Mr. Hylton: and fearful of a more explicit promise being exacted from him, knocked at the cell-door, which was immediately opened. Then cordially grasping both the poor convict’s hands, he fervently blessed him, and withdrew; with feelings much disturbed by the recollection of what had passed, and the prospect of the dismal scene, which, after his promise, awaited him.

CHAPTER VIII.

ASSURED that he would be too much agitated by the event of the ensuing Monday morning, to admit of his doing his ordinary duty at his church on the approaching Sunday, Mr. Hylton succeeded in procuring the assistance of a friend; and when the hour of divine service had arrived, Mr. Hylton was thankful that he had been relieved from a duty which he then felt that he certainly could not have gone through—at least with the requisite degree of calmness and self-possession.

When the congregation, which was crowded, and very sad, saw Mr. Hylton walk, unrobed, into his own pew, while a stranger entered the reading-desk, they too surely surmised the cause; and many eyed his harassed, benevolent countenance, with beating hearts. He was obliged to change his position once; for, as he stood, his eye fell on the seats, now vacant, which had usually been occupied by old Aycliffe and his son. Oh, where were they now! Where would one of them be at that time on the morrow? There

were portions of the sublime service of the Church, which fell on all ears, and sunk into all hearts, that day, like sounds from the unseen world. When arrived at the appropriate part of the service, the minister paused for a moment, and amidst death-like silence said—

“ The prayers of this congregation are desired for several persons dangerously ill, *and for one appointed to die!* ”

The responses to the Litany, that morning, were but faintly audible ; yet came they from the depths of hearts smitten with sympathy and fear.

All that day Milverstoke, though a secluded and rural district, afforded significant evidence of the excitement which pervaded the minds of those who lived in it and the neighbourhood. Many strangers came to the church both morning and afternoon ; afterwards to be seen talking in the churchyard, and at the doors of the houses. As Mr. Hylton, with Mrs. Hylton and their little girl, walked on to the parsonage, the obeisances of those whom he passed, were silent and almost reverential—bearing eloquent homage to his untiring zeal in the cause of humanity.

All were filled with concern at the final failure of his exertions to avert the fearful catastrophe which was to take place on the ensuing morning. The

opinion of the neighbourhood had undergone a great change, influenced by the profound respect which every one entertained for the Vicar, his character, and talents. 'If such a man,' it was said, and not without good reason, 'were so satisfied of the innocence of Ayliffe, as to have persevered with his strenuous exertions on his behalf, even up to the last moment ; and had caused such doubts to be felt in the highest quarters, as had led to the fortnight's respite, which, alas ! was to end on the morrow ;—there must be very cogent grounds for the belief on which he had acted.' Rumour had got hold of some of the circumstances on which Mr. Hylton had founded his futile hopes—and those circumstances had been, as is usually the case, greatly misrepresented, but all in favour of Ayliffe. Vague whispers, also, were heard of something having occurred at the Castle, on the night of the murder, of a very mysterious character, connected with the officers. Captain Lutteridge's visits to the Castle had been noticed, and also those of Mr. Hylton. The sudden illness of the Earl of Milverstoke, occurring just when it did, and while he was in consultation with Mr. Hylton, gave a strange, dark complexion to the whole affair. But the most substantial of all these matters was that founded on the facts which had been witnessed from the sea on the

night of the murder :—two men, no one could conjecture who, seen running along the shore, as for their lives, in a direction from the wood. What was the inference? No one thought of the possibility that these two might have been accomplices of Ayliffe; but they were given credit for having been the sole perpetrators of the appalling murder of Lord Alkmond. Then, upon all this doubt and mystery was brought to bear the excellent character which poor Ayliffe had ever borne :—perfectly irreproachable till thus accused—of a generous, affectionate, obliging nature—oh—thought all—’twas *impossible* that he could be a murderer! Then thought they of the father! the wife! the child! Oh! how this last was hugged and kissed, all unconscious of the cause of such accumulated endearments—that Sunday afternoon, by the good weeping woman-folk of the village! With what pity and awe was regarded the shut-up cottage of the Ayliffes, on which were written, in their eyes, desolation! and terror! and injustice! And, indeed, this dismal and mysterious affair had obtained notoriety, not only throughout the county, and those adjoining it, but the whole kingdom. The murder of the son and heir of a peer of the realm—and that one so powerful and eminent as the Earl of Milverstoke—might well, indeed, be regarded as an incident of national interest and importance.

The fortnight's respite had awakened universal curiosity and apprehension, lest from any cause there should be an unhappy miscarriage of justice—by the escape of the guilty, or the sacrifice of the innocent. The authorities of the county were prepared for the attendance of a prodigious concourse on the ensuing morning to witness the execution of one, either most terribly and irreparably wronged, or the most cowardly and bloody of murderers. Prudent precautions were taken, under these circumstances, to preserve the public peace. Many special constables were sworn in; every turnkey in the prison was armed, and their numbers were doubled. A strong party of soldiers, both horse and foot, was ordered to be in attendance, the former under the command of Captain Lutteridge (who heartily wished that he had been in another part of the country), and to march into the open space in the centre of the prison, at a very early hour in the morning. All this had been deemed necessary by the High Sheriff as a matter of precaution, in consequence of certain intimations which had been conveyed to him of its not being improbable that a rescue might be attempted; as had been the case, under less exciting circumstances, only half a year before, in another part of the kingdom, where a man was executed who, being at the time believed, was afterwards proved, to have been quite innocent of the crime for which he died.

At seven o'clock on Monday morning, Mr. Hylton, pale and harassed, made his appearance at the chief gate of the prison on horseback: having, not without some difficulty, got through the throng of persons pouring down to the gaol; in front of which—a sickening spectacle—stood the expectant scaffold, already surrounded by a great and continually increasing crowd—though the brief work of death was not appointed to take place before nine o'clock. When Mr. Hylton had ridden within the gates, and before he had dismounted, his eye fell on Captain Lutteridge, who, while a servant held his horse, was walking slowly to and fro with folded arms before the soldiers. His features were stern and gloomy, and he returned Mr. Hylton's hasty and somewhat agitated salutation, in silence. It was a calm, bright, spring morning; the hedges and trees which Mr. Hylton had passed were all beginning to put on their glistening verdure, and the birds hopping and fluttering about, free as the air, and chirping and singing merrily. Mr. Hylton had sighed only the more heavily for observing them.—He found the Chaplain robed and waiting for him, as they had appointed, and, after taking each of them a glass of wine that stood in readiness, Mr. Hylton, without having spoken more than a word or two, followed the Chaplain to the con-

demned cell, where, shortly after their arrival, the Sacrament was to be administered. The door stood open—three turnkeys being near it, on the outside, each with his blunderbuss; and Mr. Hylton's knees trembled beneath him, and he felt deadly faint at the first glance he got of the occupants of the cell—father and son silently locked in each other's arms; not a word had they been heard to speak, for nearly half an hour.

“Do not—do not disturb them; I cannot go in,” whispered Mr. Hylton; and they both withdrew, returning to the room which they had quitted. The Chaplain spoke not to him, nor he to the Chaplain, for some time.

“But that my word is given to this poor soul, I could almost pray to be disabled from witnessing this appalling scene,” at length said Mr. Hylton.

“Courage, courage, my dear brother!” replied the Chaplain; “the voice of duty calls you hither; you shall now see such piety and virtue, in trouble, and in death, too, as shall for ever hallow this morning's scene in your recollection. I have myself been on my knees, and in tears, besecching God Almighty that the lesson I am this morning learning, may be written on my heart till it cease to beat! and that He would give me fortitude fittingly to discharge my sacred duties. Be

not apprehensive; our charge is subdued into an awful calmness, and has inquired after you with serenity almost approaching to cheerfulness. There is with him at this moment a visible angel! But now let us return," said the Chaplain, observing that Mr. Hylton had recovered his composure.

"All is in readiness for the last sacred rite of our religion!" Again they went on their solemn errand.

"Adam, my friend," said the Chaplain gently, on entering the cell; "here comes he whom you have asked for; Mr. Hylton!"

The old man and his son were still locked in one another's arms, which, however, on the Chaplain speaking, were slowly unloosed; and two such countenances presently looked on Mr. Hylton, silently taking his seat beside them, as filled him with fear and reverence. Tearless were the eyes of both, but there was IMMORTALITY in their expression, a heavenly radiance on their solemn and wasted features. Neither father nor son spoke, as they gazed calmly at Mr. Hylton, who, as he grasped a hand of each, felt them to be cold as death: but there was no tremor in them. After a few moments they again slowly folded their arms round each other.

"Speak, Adam, tell these good gentlemen what God hath done for thee! Speak, my son, for thy God!

Hath he not taken all fear of death from thee?" said at length the old man in a low tone, but with great firmness.

"He hath! and I know it is He that hath done it, of his unspeakable mercy!" replied his son, who, leaning forward, kissed his father's white hair with gentle fondness and reverence.

"Here is my only son; God gave him to me, and hath allowed us many years of love together. He is now taking him back again! I shall stay a little time after thee, Adam; only a little: and assuredly we meet again!"

"The blessing of the ever-merciful God be upon you, Adam; upon you both," said Mr. Hylton.

The prisoner slowly raised to his lips Mr. Hylton's hand, and kissed it.

"I thank you, Sir, for coming as you promised! But—I cannot speak much," said he, with an air of infinite sweetness. "Oh! what love and pity you have ever shown me!" Here the Chaplain made a sign to Mr. Hylton that all was in readiness for the Sacrament, which was thereupon administered with an awful solemnity.

When it was over, "How much longer hath he to live?" inquired the father, as soon as he had risen from his knees, and kissed the forehead of his son. He

spoke to the Under Sheriff, who had joined with them in the sublime ceremony which was just over.

“One hour and a-half—or only a very few minutes more,” he replied, looking sadly at his watch.

“May my son and I pass that hour alone?” inquired the old man: and added, turning to his son, “Adam, wouldst thou not rather that we spend this our last hour together, with no eye on us but that of God?”

“Yes, I would,” replied the prisoner, calmly; but oh! *remember!*” said he, turning towards Mr. Hylton, and fixing on him an eye of mysterious expression.

“I do! I will!” replied Mr. Hylton; “at the hour’s close, I will, with God’s permission, again be with you, and remain!” On this the prisoner grasped his hand with silent energy.

“We will now leave you,” said the Under Sheriff, “for exactly one hour; and then it will be necessary for you to quit this room for another;” by which he meant the press-room, where the prisoner’s irons were to be knocked off. All then withdrew, and the cell-door was closed and locked. Word was from time to time brought to Mr. Hylton and the Chaplain, during that hour, that the occupants of the cell were engaged in almost constant prayer. The Chaplain’s room, in which they were sitting, together with the Under Sheriff, overlooked the yard where the military

stood; and shortly after they had entered this room, the window being open, Mr. Hylton overheard the stern peremptory voice of Captain Lutteridge say a few words to the mounted dragoons, which were followed by the sounds of re-mounting. When the noise thus occasioned was over, both Mr. Hylton and the Chaplain distinctly heard the confused hum as of a great multitude, apparently close to them; and such was indeed the fact: the Governor taking occasion, as time wore on, to come into their room and inform them that the concourse without was beyond all measure the greatest that he or any one else in the prison had ever seen collected together; but, he added, that the road through which they should have to pass to the fatal spot, was very short, railed off, and guarded by a strong body of constables.

“And though we think it right to be prepared,” he added, glancing towards the window significantly; “at present there has been not the slightest ground for apprehending any sort of disturbance.” Mr. Hylton took the opportunity of the Governor leaving the room, to speak alone with the Under Sheriff on a subject which sickened him as he mentioned it.

“Must every portion—*every* portion of the sentence be carried into literal effect, Mr. Under Sheriff?”

“Certainly, Sir; certainly,” he replied with a sur-

prised air ; but added quietly, “ Oh ! you mean, I dare say, whether the body must be given up to be dissected ? ” Mr. Hylton nodded in silence.

“ Assuredly ; quite a matter of course, Reverend Sir, however painful to the friends or survivors. It is a part of the sentence, and can on no account be dispensed with. Not,” he whispered, “ if I may say it between us, that if very great interest were made, more than a *nominal* ”— Here the prison bell began to toll—oh ! dismal, dismal sound !—and the Under Sheriff ceased, took out his watch, and, observing the hour, withdrew in silence. In a few minutes’ time Mr. Hylton and the Sheriff heard a clanking sound, as of one passing their door in fetters ; and immediately afterwards, the Chaplain informed him that the prisoner was going to the press-room, where his irons were to be removed, and then the final preparations would be made.

“ Poor soul ! he will now soon be out of his misery ! ” said the Chaplain : and as he spoke, a turnkey came silently, motioning them to follow him. Mr. Hylton, with a beating heart, accompanied the Chaplain into the chamber, where, as he entered, he saw a turnkey in the act of knocking off the prisoner’s irons. Ayliffe stood erect, his eyes fixed upwards, and his lips firmly compressed together ; while his father, with both his

arms grasping one of the prisoner's, buried his head so that it could not be seen. The tolling of the bell, at intervals, had an almost palsyng effect upon the shaken nerves of Mr. Hylton. There was a petrifying silence for a few moments, as soon as the irons had been removed from the prisoner; and with suddenly averted eyes Mr. Hylton then observed approaching the prisoner one whose ghastly office was but too manifest. But at that moment a hasty step was heard entering the room; and turning round, Mr. Hylton observed the Governor of the gaol, with a face blanched by emotion of some sort, rapidly beckon to the Under Sheriff, who instantly quitted the room.

"I devoutly hope," whispered the Chaplain with evident agitation, "that this is no riot or attempted rescue!"

They both turned round; and Mr. Hylton quitted the room. In a few seconds afterwards he lost all sense of what was going on, and staggered unconsciously into the arms of the Governor, as the latter uttered the words—"A reprieve! Positively! A reprieve!"

The Under Sheriff, with cool self-possession, though with humanity, stepped instantly back to the press-room; and without entering, locked the door, and then went to ascertain, beyond all doubt, how the fact really

was. That something extraordinary had happened was evident. Outside was a prodigious commotion; inside were Captain Lutteridge and his dragoons, sword in hand, ready to charge at an instant's notice : but, thank God ! there was no necessity for their services. A confused cry some few minutes before had been heard from the extremity of the crowd, which stretched round a large building so as to be unable to catch any view of what was going on at the gaol ; but on turning the other way they beheld a startling sight : a post-chaise and four, with a horseman riding beside it, all at full gallop ; and inside the chaise was a man waving something white.

“ Stop ! stop !—stop the execution ! A reprieve ! a reprieve ! ” was shouted by both the person inside the chaise, and the horseman without. The cry was instantly caught, and presently an unusual thundering sound was heard from the crowd, echoing the word “ Reprieve ! reprieve ! reprieve ! ”

Round the outskirts of the crowd was in a twinkling seen dashing along towards the back of the gaol, where stood the chief entrance, the post-chaise and its accompanying horseman, each of whom bore a precious document, even under the sign-manual, both having been separately dispatched from London, to prevent all possibility of accident ; and just eighteen minutes

before the prison clock struck nine, the two authoritative acts of mercy were in the hands of those to whom they were addressed, the representative of the High Sheriff, and the Governor of the gaol.

Ay, there had been no miscarrying—there was no mistake. The swords, carbines, and muskets of the expectant soldiery were not, thank God! to be turned upon the vast honest-hearted English crowd which stood outside, shouting, till their voices were well nigh cracked, “Hurrah! hurrah! God save the King!”

On hearing all this, Captain Lutteridge hastily dismounted, and got sight of one of the documents which had proved of such prodigious potency. He quietly read it all over, and then somewhat quickly returned to the yard and mounted his horse.

“My lads,” said he, addressing the soldiers, “hearken to me, do you see. His Majesty the King, whose servants we are, hath been pleased to reprieve the prisoner, of his own good will and royal pleasure; whereupon, my lads, we may by-and-bye return to our quarters, and in your hearts you may say, ‘Long live King George!’—though that, doubtless, you do always; for you serve the best and greatest King on earth, that is certain.”

The Captain was even meditating for a moment an

extravagance, viz. to give his men leave to *shout* "God save the King;" but discipline and a sense of dignity repressed any such exuberant manifestation of enthusiasm; he looked, however, at their pleased faces with great inward satisfaction; and a smile nearly stole over his grave rigid features, as he said to himself,—

‘Those lads of mine are good lads; and methinks I know one that will make another of them, that I’ve long had my eye on. Piff! paff! If I can only catch hold of this man Ayliffe, I’ll have him pretty quickly clapped on horseback, and in the ranks—and a better trooper than he will make is not to be seen. I’ll warrant me he’ll do a trifle of good service for his most merciful Majesty.’

But the Captain was here reckoning without his host. It was true that a pardon had arrived for Ayliffe, but only a conditional one, and that condition was—transportation to the Colonies for life! When the astounding news of his deliverance was communicated to him whom they suddenly snatched out of the gaping jaws of death, the hangman had just completed pinioning the prisoner’s hands.

“Loose those cords,” said the Under Sheriff, as calmly as he could; and, holding in his hand the document on which he was acting, he approached Ayliffe, and said, “Adam Ayliffe, his Majesty the King hath

sent thee a pardon under his own sign-manual, on condition that thou be transported for life.—God save the King : so thou well mayest say !”

The prisoner staggered back for some paces before the cords could be loosed from his arms, as ordered by the Sheriff.

“Come, lad ! come, come !” quoth the executioner, “take it steadily—take it quietly, lad—thou’st plenty of time to think on’t, I assure thee, both here and elsewhere.”

But Ayliffe still staggered back, with the appearance of one stunned by some sudden blow. Then he sunk, with a half-stupified air, on his knees, with his hands clasped together. From this position the executioner raised him, and seated him on a form which was near. In a few moments’ time his face was covered with a clammy sweat, one, indeed, that had burst through every pore of his body. His grim attendant took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped Ayliffe’s face gently.

“Fetch him some water, Gregory,” said he to his man, who, in truth, had not yet quite recovered his own wits, which had been scattered by the suddenness of the affair.

He soon, however, obeyed his master, and in a few moments’ time returned with some water, into which the Governor had put a glass of wine. Ayliffe,

however, seemed to recoil from the sight of it, and, as though with a choking sensation, hastily motioned off the hand that held it to his lips; and there was horror in his eye. At length he opened his mouth with a sudden gasp, and heaved a mighty sigh—and another—and another.

“This is right,” quoth the executioner, patting him on the back; “he’ll soon come to himself. Nay, lad, don’t be frightened—I’ve done with thee! Why—how thou starest! Well,” he added hastily, whispering, as he heard the Governor’s well-known heavy step approaching the room, “Good-bye, good-bye, my man. I do think thou wouldst have done well, and stood it bravely outside!”

Ayliffe gazed vacantly at him, as the hideous functionary slunk away: all present seeming to breathe more freely when he was gone.

Old Ayliffe had fallen senseless on the floor the moment that he had heard the Sheriff’s announcement, and lay there for some minutes quite unobserved; those present being sufficiently occupied with the person principally concerned in that day’s tragic and agitating proceedings. The rescued prisoner, however, recovered himself sufficiently to think of his venerable parent; but by the time that he was fully conscious of what had taken place, alas! he found himself the soli-

tary tenant of a cell in the prison, whither he had been conveyed, almost unconsciously, by the Governor's order, for security's sake. In answer to his loud and agonising cries, he was presently informed by the Governor that his father was not well, having been somewhat overcome by the suddenness of that which had just taken place. The truth was, that the poor old man had lain insensible so long, in spite of all that could be done for him, as to alarm the gaol doctor for his safety. He was treated with all imaginable kindness, and taken to a chamber in the prisoners' part of the gaol; lying on the very bed which had been occupied, some few months before, by his son.

There was yet another person then within those gloomy walls, on whom the marvellous occurrence of that morning had produced an overwhelming effect, and that was Mr. Hylton; to whom alone was attributable, under Providence, the deliverance of Adam Ayliffe from the ignominious and horrible death which, to all human appearance, had been inevitable.

Impelled by an irresistible impulse, and fortified by an unwavering conviction of the prisoner's innocence, Mr. Hylton, on the Friday evening, as a last resource, had, relying on the King's well-known sternly independent character, written a letter to His Majesty, under cover to a nobleman, then in London attending

Parliament; and with whom Mr. Hylton had been acquainted at College. He earnestly entreated his Lordship to lose not a moment in securing a personal interview with the King; or, at all events, the delivery into His Majesty's hands, of the letter in question, touching as it did life and death; its object being to save from execution, on the Monday morning, a man who was, in the writer's opinion, as innocent of the death of which he had nevertheless been found guilty, as the Secretary of State himself, to whom application on behalf of the convict had been unhappily made in vain. Mr. Hylton's letter to the King was expressed in terms of grave eloquence. It set out with calling His Majesty's attention to the execution, six months before, of a man, for a crime, of which three days afterwards he was demonstrated to have been innocent. Then the letter gave a moving picture of the exemplary life and character of the prisoner, and of his father; pointed to testimonials given in his favour at the trial, and added the writer's own; together with the most emphatic and strong conviction which could be expressed in language, that whoever might have been the perpetrator of this most atrocious murder, it was not the prisoner doomed to die on Monday. It then conjured His Majesty, by every consideration which could properly have weight

with a sovereign intrusted with authority by Almighty God to govern according to justice and mercy, to give his personal attention to the case then laid before him, and act thereon according to His Majesty's own royal and clement judgment. This letter Mr. Hylton's noble acquaintance travelled thirty miles, at great inconvenience, to lay before the King; who did not receive it till past midnight, at St. James's, and after he had been in bed for upwards of an hour. On hearing, however, from the nobleman who brought the letter, that it was one of a very urgent nature, concerning life and death, those who were intrusted with guarding the royal repose, caused it to be broken by the delivery of the packet. His Majesty instantly got out of bed, and, after hastily glancing over the letter, directed Lord Farnborough to be sent for forthwith, and to bring along with him all the papers he had or could lay his hand on, relating to Adam Ayliffe, then lying under sentence of death for the murder of Lord Alkmond. His Majesty had paced his chamber many times, very impatiently, before his astonished Minister arrived: for the latter had had to go from his private residence, where he also was in bed, to his office, in order to get the documents required by the King, and had experienced great difficulty in finding them; all clerks and others being, as might well be supposed, out

of the way. Immediately on his entering the King's ante-chamber, Lord Farnborough encountered His Majesty, who in a bluff way begged him to be seated at a table, duly furnished with lights and writing materials : and then the King requested to hear the whole facts of the case ; to which he paid great attention. When Lord Farnborough had, in his usual terse and emphatic fashion, put His Majesty in possession of his, Lord Farnborough's, view of the case, assuring His Majesty, with expressions of profound respect, that a clearer case for hanging there never had been, if justice were to be any longer administered in the country ; his Lordship appeared confounded when the King said, very thoughtfully, that he was by no means so clear on the subject as seemed his Lordship ; and in fact felt so uneasy on the matter, being one of life and death, that he could not return to bed without deciding one way or the other. Lord Farnborough assured the King that he need feel no anxiety whatever on a matter which was exclusively within the province of his Ministers.

“ Why look you, my Lord Farnborough,” quoth the King, somewhat hastily and sternly, “ suppose you and I differ on this matter ? ”

“ Please your Majesty, we are your Majesty's sworn responsible servants ” —

“So, so, because you are my servants, my Lord Farnborough, I am to be your puppet, eh?—to register your decrees *volens volens*! By those that begot me, and those before me, but I will show you otherwise! Look you, my Lord, and all of you that serve me; I am set over my people to protect them, and am answerable for them, to Him who set me over them: and if it cost me my crown, look you, as I must answer for it hereafter, I won’t see the humblest creature calling me King, deprived of his life, even though according to law (which can’t give back life taken wrongly), if I in my conscience do verily doubt whether he ought to die.”

Lord Farnborough said something rather faintly about a constitutional monarchy:—

“Ay,” said the King, catching the word, “but I am also a conscientious King, my Lord. My advisers may be impeached in Parliament if they give me evil advice; but I have to answer to the King of Kings; and none but a King can tell a King’s feelings in these matters. God Almighty only knows what I suffered some half a year ago, in a matter of this sort—eh, my Lord? What say you to that? Have you forgotten it?”

“Not at all, please your Majesty; but I take leave humbly to represent, Sire, in the matter now before your Majesty, that your Majesty has no discretion herein, but must allow the law to take its course.”

"I won't, I WON'T, my Lord. There are features about this case that I don't like ; and, in short, I shall not have this man die. Transport him for life, if you please ; then, if we be wrong, he may return : BUT—there are paper, pens, and ink ; pray, my Lord, let it be done instantly, for time is precious ; I will put my hand to it now—and then methinks I shall sleep soundly till morning."

"Pardon me, Sire," began his Lordship, with an air of vast deference"—

"No, no ! not *you*—I have nought to pardon you ; 'tis another I mean to pardon"—

"Sire, this really is one of the plainest cases of guilt"—

"Did you not say the very same thing to me, my Lord, on the occasion I have just spoken of?" inquired the King very solemnly : "did I not *then* say I had doubts ? but I yielded to your *certainty*, my Lord ! And what followed?"

"Please your Majesty we are all frail ; all human institutions are liable to error."

"Therefore," said the King quickly, "ought we the longer to doubt, in matters of life and death, my Lord."

"I do assure your Majesty that this interference of your Majesty will give great dissatisfaction"—

"To whom ? Where ? Why?" inquired the King

sternly. "What is that to me, when my conscience is concerned, who have sworn an oath, when God Almighty placed my crown on my head, to cause law and justice, IN MERCY, to be executed in all my judgments? Who swore that oath, my people, or I? I did, and with God's assistance will keep my oath. And as for my people, they are a brave and virtuous people, and won't obey me the less, because I will not again let any one die on a gibbet, hastily."

Lord Farnborough remained with his eyes very seriously fixed on the King, and his pen in his hand, which hung down by his side.

"Let it be done, my Lord," said the King peremptorily: and his Minister obeyed.

Within a couple of hours' time down went the messengers of mercy, whose arrival has been already duly told. The King went to bed very comfortably; the Minister returned to his, most exceedingly uncomfortable—with, as it were, a bee buzzing in each ear, and tickling, even to stinging, his consequence, personal and official; expecting to be questioned pretty sharply in Parliament, on what had taken place. He resolved, however, that *then* he would loyally uphold his royal master's act, at all hazards, and give him full credit for the noble spirit in which he had acted; and he would ask, what if it should afterwards turn out that,

but for the King, this man would have been hanged innocent? And who should gainsay the justice of the King's reference to the very painful occasion of a former, fatal and irreparable, miscarriage of justice?

When Mr. Hylton entered the cell where Ayliffe sat, now not fettered, he sprung from his seat, and then dropping on his knees, embraced those of Mr. Hylton, crying like a child. Yet knew he nothing of that last interference of his exemplary benefactor, which had saved him at the eleventh hour from swinging a dishonoured corpse from the gallows, which they were at that moment taking down.

"God has been very, very merciful towards you, Adam," said Mr. Hylton; "and your spared life will be a monument of that mercy! Adam, now that no power on earth can again place you in jeopardy on this charge, I ask you, as in the immediate presence of your merciful God, are you innocent?"

"Oh, Mr. Hylton! oh, kind and most beloved Sir! how can you ask? Do you, then, doubt? Have I not just been standing half way in eternity, and almost face to face with Him that was to judge me; and could I stand there with a lie on my lips? Ay, innocent am I as my own poor crippled child." Here he burst into an agony of weeping.

"Well, well, Adam, you must forgive me. I ought not, perhaps, to have asked you such a question—I feel

that I ought not; but you know not yet the awful responsibility which I have incurred on your behalf, and in reliance on your word. Adam, once for all, I tell you that I am as thoroughly persuaded of your innocence of this awful crime, as I am of mine own; and may God himself, if it please his infinite wisdom, one day make it plain to us, even here, in this life."

Ayliffe answered with a look and a manner eloquent with injured innocence, "Amen! yea, Amen! Amen! Sir." And then, burying his face with his hands, uttered aloud a few words of fervent prayer and praise, to which Mr. Hylton most reverently responded. "And now for Sarah, Sir. Oh, Sally! Sally! Sally Shall we, then, meet again!" exclaimed Ayliffe, some time afterwards, in a frantic manner.

"Adam, try to be calmer; it is very natural that you should be excited"—

"Why, Sir, *Is she dead?*" said Ayliffe, in a whisper that echoed through the soul of Mr. Hylton, who was also startled by the wild despairing eye that was staring at him.

"She is not dead, Adam," replied Mr. Hylton; "and I go hence to see her."

Ayliffe burst into bitter weeping, and sobbed, "Oh! that I might go with you, Sir, to see her dear face, though but for one moment!"

"Adam, be thankful to God that it is as it is—that

I have now to prepare her, not for your death, but your life."

"Oh! yes, Sir! thanks be to God for his infinite mercy! I leave it all to Him! for what have I deserved at His Hand!"

"What, indeed, Adam!" echoed Mr. Hylton.

With infinite tenderness and judgment did Mr. Hylton discharge the very critical duty which he had undertaken. His cautiously uttered words fell upon the ear and sunk into the fainting soul of poor Mrs. Ayliffe, like drops, as it were, of living water. What tears oozed from her closed eyes, and flowed down her wan and wasted cheeks! She knew not, so vigilant had been her faithful attendants, at the repeated instance of Mr. Hylton and the doctor resident at the Infirmary, the awful aspect with which had dawned upon her doomed husband that memorable Monday morning. And all that Mr. Hylton dared to tell her was, that her husband's *life* was no longer in danger. It was not till Mr. Hylton rode at a brisk canter into the village, passing many old familiar faces wearing an expression of tearful congratulation at the issue of his humane exertions (the last of which, however, had not then become known), nor till he felt Mrs. Hylton sobbing in his arms, and his little Mary crying she scarce knew why, but not with an unhappy cry, that that good pastor of his flock felt

the full luxury of having done good, and upon his humble handiwork the radiant seal of God's blessing. Oh, happy moment! in which he forgot all his past agonies and long-unrequited toil, and said, with profound devoutness and self-abasement, "Not unto us, O God! not unto us, but UNTO THY name give glory for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

About the middle of the next day, he went out on foot, some mile or two upon the road, to meet one whom he expected, and into whose well-nigh broken heart also he had been the honoured instrument of pouring the balm of consolation. 'Twas old Adam Ayliffe, sitting between a farmer and his wife, who had gone in their market-cart purposely to bring him home. The good woman's arm was kindly placed round the spare and feeble figure of the venerable sufferer, as her husband, on Mr. Hylton's coming up, stopped the cart. The old man then tried to rise, but in vain, his knees evidently tottering under him; and with trembling hands he raised his broad hat from his head, and looked unutterable gratitude towards Mr. Hylton, who himself could hardly speak, as he grasped one of Ayliffe's extended hands. His eyes were fixed tearlessly on Mr. Hylton for a long time, during which they spoke volumes of thrilling feeling.

"God bless thy dear bald head, Adam," said the

farmer's wife, gently pressing upon it his hat ; "do not thou catch cold ; the parson, belike, may come and see thee when we get home."

"Yes, yes, I will," said Mr. Hylton, and followed them on to the cottage ; which, during the preceding day and that morning, had been got to rights and made very tidy, against his return, by some dozen eager and affectionate pairs of hands : who had trimmed the little garden, cut the hedge, and cleaned the little windows till they looked clear as crystal. Ah, dear little services, how eloquent you are !—When the cart arrived at the cottage, old Ayliffe was carefully helped down, having under his arm his old Bible ; and the hasty glance of affectionate reverence with which he regarded it, did not pass unregarded by the watchful eye of Mr. Hylton. Inside the cottage was Mrs. Hylton, who had intended to come out and welcome home the poor old man ; but on seeing him, her heart failed her, and she remained within, trying to busy herself for a moment with the little table on which her own hands had placed some small matters of refreshment. When Adam entered, leaning on Mr. Hylton's arm, all who were present, and there were several, rose and received him silently, being unable, when they saw his face, to speak a word ; nor could he, but shook his head in silence. And when one of them, on his sitting down,

brought him his little grandson, he folded in his arms its pale and silent figure, and presently his tears fell fast. They relieved him ; and by-and-bye he was able to say, though in a very faint way, " God bless you all, good friends !" and he drank, without uttering a word, the glass of wine which Mr. Hylton had given him ; and, perhaps recollecting on what occasion it was that wine had last touched his lips, he looked upward with an awful expression.

In the course of the next week, poor Ayliffe was removed, handcuffed, from the county gaol, together with several other prisoners, and conveyed to a vessel in a neighbouring port ; and thence was duly brought to London, and placed on board a ship, to be conveyed abroad, in pursuance of the conditions of his pardon. He had spoken scarcely a syllable between the time of his quitting the gaol, and being lodged on shipboard, a handcuffed convict, shunned even by his guilty brethren, as one stained with blood, and unjustly saved from the scaffold. He resented no petty indignity which was offered him, and there were many, inflicted by those who loathed the vile Cheat-the-gallows : and his patient endurance they attributed to consciousness that he had no right to cumber the ground, to pollute by his accursed presence the land of the living. All this he bore in silence.

His big, indignant heart seemed constantly on the point of breaking. No kind word to *him*, ever fell upon his ear. He felt desolate and blighted, bearing the brand of Cain, upon the brow of innocence.

For he WAS innocent!

The unfortunate Earl of Milverstoke lay, for a long while, in a most precarious state. The first words which he spoke, on regaining full consciousness, after having remained without it for nearly a fortnight, were to his daughter, who sat, pale and worn, beside him.

"Emily," said he, feebly, "let me, during the day, see Mr. Hylton :—" and he was obeyed.

When Mr. Hylton seated himself, some hours afterwards, in a chair placed for him beside the prostrate peer, it was with mingled hope and apprehension ; for with what feelings his Lordship might recollect the closing scene of their memorable interview Mr. Hylton knew not. He gazed at the sunken features of the Earl with deep emotion.

"Mr. Hylton," said his Lordship, faintly, "have you forgiven me?"

"My dear Lord," he replied, gently, "I have nothing to forgive. Were you fit to bear it, I should ask you to forgive *me*"—

"Do you think that God will forgive me?" inquired the Earl, closing his eyes.

“To be sure He will, my dear Lord!” replied Mr. Hylton, with energy; “He will! if He be but rightly asked for forgiveness!” The Earl shook his head sadly; and his wasted fingers, white as snow, grasped Mr. Hylton’s hand.

“May I—still—reckon on your pious services—towards me and my family?”

“Oh, my dear Lord,” replied Mr. Hylton, with subdued fervour, “as long as I live, and it may please God to enable me to serve you!”

“There are those here,” said the Earl with some difficulty, “who love, who reverence you: and I am one of them, but the unworthiest!” Again his fingers gently compressed those of Mr. Hylton, who was much affected. “When I have a little more strength, Mr. Hylton, we will speak of THAT—of which we have already spoken, but it will be in a different spirit.”

Mr. Hylton bowed silently, with feelings of earnest respect and sympathy, and also with others of a profound and agitating character. For alas! to him had been intrusted the trying and terrible duty, undertaken by him only in deference to the agonizing importunities of Lady Emily, of communicating to her noble parent intelligence, which had reached her accidentally, and while utterly unprepared for it; and by which not only she, but shortly afterwards Lady

Alkmond, had been fearfully agitated, and for a while prostrated.

Among several letters which had come to the Castle shortly after the Earl's sudden illness, was one marked "Immediate" and "Private and Confidential," and bearing outside the name of the Secretary of State. From this letter poor Lady Emily learnt the lamentable intelligence, that her brother, the late Lord Alkmond, had, when on the Continent, and shortly before his marriage, slain in a duel an Hungarian officer, whom, having challenged for some affront which had passed at dinner, he had run through the heart, and killed on the spot: the unfortunate officer leaving behind him, alas! a widow and several orphans, all of them reduced to beggary. The dispute which had led to these disastrous results, had been one of really a trivial nature, but magnified into importance by the young Lord's quick and imperious temper, which had led him to dictate terms of apology so humiliating and offensive, that no one could submit to them. Wherefore the two met; and presently the Hungarian fell dead, his adversary's rapier having passed clean through the heart. It was, however, an affair that had been managed with perfect propriety; with an exact observance of the rules of duelling! All had been done legitimately! Yet was it MURDER; an

honourable, a right honourable, murder : murder as clear and glaring, before the Judge of all the earth, as that by which Lord Alkmond had himself fallen. When thus fearfully summoned away to his account, the young noble's own hand was crimsoned with the blood which he had shed : and so went he into the awful presence of the Most High, whose voice had ever upon earth been sounding tremendous in his ears,—*Where is thy brother? What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.* Unhappy man ! well might his heart have been heavy, when men expected it to be lightest ! Well might his countenance darken, and his soul shudder within him, under the mortal throes of a guilty conscience ! From his father's splendid banqueting-table he had been driven by remorse and horror ; for his companions, unconscious that they were stabbing to the heart one who was present, WOULD TALK of duelling, and of one sanguinary duel in particular, that bore a ghastly resemblance to his own. Such poor amends as might be in his power to make, he had striven to offer to the miserable family whom he had bereaved, beggared, and desolated, to vindicate an honour which had never been for one instant really questioned, or compromised ; and if it *had* been tarnished, could BLOOD cleanse and brighten it ? All the money that

he could ordinarily obtain from the Earl, had from time to time been furnished by Lord Alkmond to the family of his victim. For them it was that he had importuned his father for a sum of money sufficient to make for them an ample and permanent provision. Only the day before that on which he had quitted London, to partake of the Christmas festivities, had he written an earnest letter to the person abroad with whom he had long communicated on the subject, assuring him that within a few weeks an ample and satisfactory final arrangement should be made. And he had resolved to make a last strenuous effort with the Earl; but whom, nevertheless, he dared not, except as a matter of dire necessity, tell the nature of his exigency. And why dared not the son tell his father? And why had that father shrunk, blighted, from the mention, by Captain Lutteridge and Mr. Hylton, of the conversation which had driven his son out into the solitude where he was slain? Alas! it opened to Lord Milverstoke himself a very frightful retrospect: through the vista of years his anguished, terror-stricken eye settled upon a crimsoned gloom—

—Oh, Lord Milverstoke!—and then would echo in thy ears, also, those appalling sounds,—*what hast THOU done?*

For THY—Honour! also, had been dyed in blood!

CHAPTER IX.

THOUGH no one liked to own it, or much less speak of it, the coming struggle for Senior Wrangler was pretty generally felt in the University to be one, as it were, between patrician and plebeian; since it had been for a length of time perceived that the contest lay between a noble member of a leading College and an obscure Sizar of an obscure College, which had never before signalised itself by producing even a creditable candidate for the laurel. The aristocrat was deservedly popular, a favourite with everybody. Handsome and graceful, engaging, affable, dignified, and unaffected, there was also a certain charming modesty and pensiveness in his demeanour, which some referred to the early and severe religious discipline which he was said to have received—a notion borne out by his exemplary conduct at College; and others, to profound love of study. These appeared somewhat unusual characteristics of the immediate heir to one of the most ancient peerages in the realm, and its vast unencumbered estates,—to wealth which made dizzy the heads of those

who were weak enough to contemplate the possession of it with envious longings. To the destined lord of it, however, it seemed unattended with these effects. He was as assiduous and systematic in his studies, as though his daily bread had depended altogether on his obtaining academical distinction. His private tutor, himself a picked man, who had gained *almost* the highest honours, gave out from time to time confident assurances of his noble pupil's capabilities, and inspired high hopes of honour for his College; which, though a distinguished one, had not for the preceding four years produced a Senior Wrangler. But my Lord and his very numerous well-wishers were not, it seemed, to have it all their own way. For it had slowly grown into a rumour, during the year preceding the day of contest, that a person, of whom scarcely any one knew or had heard anything,—in fact, the aforesaid Sizar,—was coming out to do battle on behalf of his long un-honoured and humble College, against the whole University. The more that the matter was inquired into, the more exciting and interesting became the anticipated contest; shadowing out in the minds of the solemn and quiet men looking on, a certain battle between Goliath of Gath, and one David. The tutor of the favourite made it his business to become acquainted, as far as practicable, with the real

probabilities of the case; and the result was a very complete conviction that his pupil would have to encounter, in this champion of obscurity, a most formidable opponent, one apparently born with a genius for mathematics and the hidden mysteries of physical science. A Fellow, in the confidence of my Lord's tutor, desirous of probing the proficiency of this unknown disciple of Newton, threw himself in his way; and was pleased to declare himself puzzled with a certain question in high mathematics, which had occurred to him: *i. e.* he had picked it out of a recently published foreign scientific treatise. His teeth, however, presently chattered; for his difficulty was disposed of with a masterly ease, and also with a certain elegance that, under the circumstances, were most unsatisfactory and alarming to him whose genuine doubts had been solved. Who was this person? No one knew anything of him except his name, "Southern," and that of his College; that he led a very secluded life; appeared very poor; was studious, yet by no means devoted exclusively to mathematics, having such superior classical acquirements, as were quite unusual in the case of candidates for mathematical honours. In short, whoever he might be, he seemed likely to prove himself a first-rate man, and his College began to regard him

with great interest ; and its members, as the moment of contest approached, went about talking with a mighty easy air about the result. This led to increased energy and activity of operation among a certain large class of ardent University men, well versed in the pecuniary calculation of chances, and resolute in maintaining, even at considerable risk, any opinion which they might have espoused on a given subject ; which in the present case was, Which of these two will come out Senior Wrangler ? The higher class of men pretty generally backed the plebeian ; the lower, the patrician : that is to say, the plebeians professed, and probably very sincerely felt, a deep interest in my Lord's success ; while the patricians, and those of plebeian rank who were of natural nobility, felt a generous interest on behalf of his Lordship's obscure and unbefriended competitor. And it must be recorded to his honour, that no man in the University could surpass in genuine and exalted feeling, that which animated the young aristocrat towards his untitled and, so far, therefore, ignoble rival. As the day of battle drew nigh, these two met, not quite undesignedly on my Lord's part ; who very shortly established himself deservedly in the high estimation of his opponent. Each talked freely on his respective prospects, each admired the other's modesty, and entertained sharp

qualms or twinges of apprehension as to the result of the contest. Several times in the dusk of the evening they were seen walking together ; and a very striking contrast was there in the outward appearance of those on whose movements and prospects were now concentrated the curiosity and interest of the whole University. One was tall, slender, erect, graceful ; the other short, lame, and a little distorted in figure. In short, though no person in the University knew it, one was son to the man who, nearly twenty years before, had been condemned to the gallows, on the charge of having murdered the father of the other ! for who else should these two be, but the Lord Viscount Alkmond, and Adam Ayliffe ! Strange, very strange, was it, yet true ; and while the two combatants, Lord Alkmond and Mr. Southern, are in honourable and exceedingly eager strife together for the mastery, which of them shall be declared THE FIRST MAN OF THE UNIVERSITY, let us take a rapid retrospect of the interval of nearly twenty years which has elapsed since those two young men,—now walking together arm-in-arm, in amicable collegiate equality, each respecting, and fearing, the talents and acquirements of the other, —were lying respectively in castle, and cottage, at Milverstoke—oh, under what different circumstances !

— Twenty years ! Prodigious interval in the life of

man! How blessed is he who can turn himself round to contemplate it, with reverent composure and thankfulness; enjoying the humble and well-founded hope that he has become a wiser, a better, and a happier, albeit a somewhat sadder, man, than when those twenty years began! Though he has not been *cut down*, has he during all that momentous period been merely *cumbering the ground*, remaining now barren and blighted? or diligently self-cultivated and nourished, so as to thrive and bloom in immortality?

Mr. Hylton; the Earl of Milverstoke; and old Adam Ayliffe—all still were living; as also were some others who have appeared in the former part of this history: and how have they fared? what have they done? what have they become, during those twenty years?

Mr. Hylton's hair is white as snow, but his eye is bright, his face beams with a benignity that is endearing and elevating to the heart of the beholder. Still he lives at Milverstoke parsonage; and his good wife, also stricken in years, is still by his side, his cheerful, pious, and affectionate helpmate: his daughter, sole surviving child, has been spared to them, and has become—a woman—a charming woman. But how many of his parishioners has Mr. Hylton during these twenty years consigned to the tomb, reading over their remains, in solemn hopefulness,

that sublime service which he trusts that some pious soul will by-and-bye read over *his* remains, when he also shall have become a tenant of the churchyard, sleeping beside those whom he has buried, and his children !

Upwards of a month elapsed from the time of Mr. Hylton's first visit to the Earl of Milverstoke after his illness, before Mr. Hylton deemed it prudent to communicate to him the afflicting intelligence concerning his late son, which has been already laid before the reader. There were reasons which rendered it highly expedient that no time should be needlessly lost in making the revelation in question, in order to protect the Earl from harassing importunities on behalf of the widow and orphans of the officer who had been killed by Lord Alkmond, and whose case had been repeatedly and very urgently pressed on the Secretary of State, through the intervention of the British and foreign ambassadors. In spite of all the discretion and skill of Mr. Hylton in making such an agitating communication to one so ill able to bear it, that communication almost prostrated the Earl both in mind and body. For upwards of half a year he lay at death's door ; and for several weeks was bereft of reason. During those benighted intervals he not only raved wildly about his son, and the fearful

transaction in which he had been engaged, but let fall expressions of dismal import, explicable only by a reference to some event of a similar nature in his own early life ! He grievously reproached himself for not having instilled into his son, from earliest youth, an abhorrence of duelling ; for not having affectionately and vigilantly trained and disciplined his hasty and imperious temper ; and, above all, uttered lamentable accusations against himself for his hard-heartedness in not having yielded to his son's entreaties to be supplied with money (he had asked a sum of five thousand pounds), and encouraged him to disclose that which so evidently pressed upon his mind. And even after the Earl had recovered the use of his reason, he would talk in the same strain to Mr. Hylton ; and began to express a suspicion lest the death of Lord Alkmond should, in some mysterious and horrid way unknown, have had a connection with his fatal duel. That idea had presented itself, indeed, to Mr. Hylton's mind. He thought it by no means impossible that some friend or member of the family of Lord Alkmond's victim, had come over to this country, impelled by a deadly spirit of revenge, tracked out Lord Alkmond's path, waited on his movements, and seized the first fitting opportunity to destroy him. Might not the assassin or assassins be the persons who had been seen

by the sailor Harrup, from the sea, running along the shore, in a direction from the woods?

But the Earl of Milverstoke soon abandoned such ideas as chimerical, and recurred to his original opinion that the murderer had been none other than Ayliffe; whose rescue from the gallows was a subject on which the Earl never touched with Mr. Hylton, retaining his stern and sincere conviction and belief that by Ayliffe's escape, justice had been defeated. But what a vast change in his opinions, and in the whole temper of his soul, had been effected by the dreadful discovery concerning his son's sanguinary duel! Lord Milverstoke's angry rebellious feelings were quelled, and awed into a submissive recognition of God's moral government of the world—and he was terrified by the glimpses which he had obtained of His retributive justice. Declarations of Scripture which had never before attracted his attention, now gleamed before his eyes with a new aspect, and appeared invested with a tremendous significance. *Verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth! Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!* How amazing—how appalling—appeared now the indifference with which he had ever, till then, read and heard language such as this! Now it smote and shook his very soul within

him. He dared hardly think of the startling assurance that *the sins of the father might be visited upon the children—yea, even to the third and fourth generation!* What ghastly light was thus reflected upon the death of his son? How impious now the father's secret accusation against the Most High, of hard and unreasonable dealing with his creatures! When his thoughts wore this terrifying complexion, he would abandon—but, alas! only for a moment—his vindictive and implacable feelings towards Ayliffe, and cease to murmur at the dispensation of Providence, by which his life had been saved. 'Even were he guilty,'—an awful voice, within, sometimes asked the Earl of Milverstoke, 'is it for THEE to complain that the vengeance of Heaven tarrieth?' and for a while he would be speechless. Milverstoke became intolerable to the Earl: whose gloomy, unquiet, and still but half-subdued spirit dreaded solitude equally with society. How could he walk, as theretofore, in woods, which now seemed ever shrouded beneath an ensanguined haze! How appalling the silence ever reigning within the magnificent apartments of his Castle—of that stately structure where had lain so recently the bleeding remains of his son—for which it seemed to have been but a vast and dismal mausoleum! As soon, therefore, as his shattered condition would admit of his doing so,

he removed with his family to another of his residences, in a distant part of England, not haunted with such maddening associations as that which he had quitted, and, as he purposed, for ever. There was one person whom he was deeply affected in taking leave of, and that was Mr. Hylton, whose character having always respected, he now regarded with reverence. In him was lofty purpose, in him inflexible rectitude; purity unsullied; a meekness which could never be ruffled or disturbed; a simplicity, strength, and dignity of character, the foundations of which were laid in profound Christian humility, and faith. A thousand softening and self-reproaching recollections cherished the Earl, of this good man's patient gentleness under galling insult, such as his Lordship now felt would have infuriated most, if not all, others whom he had ever known in life. Mr. Hylton had, however, borne it in silence, yet without, on the one hand, surrendering an iota of his self-respect or independence, or, on the other, exhibiting the faintest approach to resentment. With what affectionate and persevering faithfulness, with what unwavering firmness, with what unbaffled skilfulness, had this, his spiritual physician, probed the unsoundness of his spirit, and then applied to it the cleansing and healing influences of religion! And even yet how much remained to be done, before the Earl

could dare to look back, without blighting terror, or contemplate the future, with any degree of calmness and hope!—Alas, not once from those rigid lips had fallen a word of forgiveness towards the supposed slayer of his peace! The language of those lips was, and ever had been, truth and sincerity. Such, also, were the regulating principles of his conduct; yet without *the one missing element*, all was the very blackness of darkness, and hopeless, eternal, exclusion from heaven. This felt Mr. Hylton, and fearfully felt; and the more, because to such absolute and intimate certainty, had not yet attained he whom it so awfully concerned. All these anxieties crowded into his mind, and many of them into that of the Earl, as his white attenuated hand finally grasped that of Mr. Hylton, before the equipage rolled away which conveyed the bereaved Earl, his beautiful but saddened daughter, and the lovely widowed mother of the little unconscious heir to all his earthly wealth, greatness, honour, and ancient lineage. The little lips of *the living Lord Alkmond!*—Mr. Hylton solemnly pressed with his own, in the Earl's presence; and with a voice and look pregnant with mysterious significance and warning, said, "REMEMBER!" The Earl leaned back in silence, in his carriage; and, a few moments afterwards, had commenced his long journey.

Both his lovely companions wept much; and as for Lady Emily, she had thrown her arms round Mr. and Mrs. Hylton, and kissed them, again and again, with all a daughter's fondness; and into Mr. Hylton's ear she softly whispered the word which he afterwards uttered to her noble father, "REMEMBER!" By that word he had signified, 'Forget not our many discourings together, nor that glorious and awful Volume which is now beginning to shine before your hitherto unseeing eyes, in letters of living light. Abhor yourself! Look within, and see in your heart a nest of serpents! Pray that they die, and disappear!—That pride, and revenge, may perish! Forgive, or ask not to be forgiven, lest you offend the awful majesty of Heaven, and draw down perdition on your soul! Adore the Unsearchable, the Just, the Merciful; but only through Him whom He hath sent! Tremble as you look on that little one, upon whom all your earthly hopes are fixed—whom you have chosen to make the pride and mainstay of your house! Let that little one be to you, not a vain idol, but a precious memento of your duty and your allegiance to Heaven, in whose anger this desire of your eyes may instantly wither and vanish. Look upon him, and tremblingly remember the doings of his progenitors!' The Lady Emily's "Remember" said gentler things! 'On me rest the

succour of those who are objects, alas, of my father's implacable animosity. But remember the reverence that is due to him from me, as a most loving daughter !'

So departed the lordly occupants of Milverstoke Castle. Lady Emily's injunctions related to the father, wife, and son of the banished Ayliffe, of whose innocence she entertained, in confident and not unjustifiable reliance on Mr. Hylton, a firm conviction. Her father's unbounded liberality gave her ample opportunity for carrying her generous purposes into effect, unknown to him, through the agency of Mr. Hylton. She settled on old Ayliffe a small weekly allowance sufficient for his modest wants, without the necessity of exertions, for which his years and his sufferings had incapacitated him. She contrived also, through Mr Hylton, to find means of sending Mrs. Ayliffe to follow her husband, about a year after his ignominious banishment, that being the earliest moment that her shattered health would permit. And as for the wretched little Adam, Lady Emily had declared that he should become her child—that she would be wholly answerable for his support. Shortly before Mrs. Ayliffe's departure to rejoin her unfortunate husband, Mr. Hylton arranged that the woman to whom the care of her infant had been committed, on the arrest of his

father, should take up her abode with her little charge at the cottage of old Ayliffe; and a touching and pleasant sight it was to behold the venerable sorrow-stricken grandfather betimes familiarizing the child with the Book to which alone, throughout life, he had himself clung for consolation and succour. 'Twas he who taught the child his letters, being as patient a teacher, as the learner was apt and docile. It seemed, indeed, as if Providence had compensated that poor little being's physical deficiencies, by intellectual endowments of a superior order. From a very early age his pale placid features evinced decided thoughtfulness. It was not timidity that characterised his demeanour and deportment, but a contemplative temperament conjoined with possibly a painful sense, increasing with his years, of physical inferiority—a combination of conditions which soon attracted the notice of an observer so acute and affectionately watchful as Mr. Hylton. He thought that the child exhibited precocity; but judiciously acted as though it had not. The death of his attentive nurse, when he was about four years old, enabled Mr. Hylton, with the consent of old Ayliffe, to carry into effect a scheme which had occurred to him, namely, the removal of the child to a distance from Milverstoke, and under another name, in order to avoid the fatal prejudice

attached to the blighted name which he bore—that of a convicted murderer!—who was generally believed to have unjustly escaped the gallows, through the caprice or timidity of the King. Mr. Hylton's indefatigable zeal overcame several difficulties in his way, apparently trivial, but, practically very embarrassing; and he ultimately succeeded, with the assistance of a clerical relative in a village on the farthest outskirts of an adjoining county, in placing the child, under the name of Southern, in the house and under the care of a village schoolmaster—a person of much higher qualifications than were requisite for the humble sphere he then occupied, and to which he had been reduced by misfortune. In a much shorter time than Mr. Hylton could have anticipated, he was gratified by receiving more and more decisive, and indeed surprising, reports of the child's capacity and progress; who presently evinced, over and above his general talents, such a mathematical faculty, as very quickly placed him beyond the reach of his master, and commended him to the special notice of the clergyman whom Mr. Hylton had interested in his behalf, and who, like Mr. Hylton, had taken high honours at Cambridge. Mr. Hylton went over to see his charge regularly once a fortnight, and personally ascertained how well founded were the reports which he had received of the child's advance-

ment. The two parsons often laid their good heads together on the subject; and at length Mr. Hylton, relying on the secret and most efficient patronage of Lady Emily, resolved to give the child a splendid start, as he called it, and put him into a position which would enable him to make the best of his rare talents. In short, Mr. Hylton, resolved, but with a sort of inward spasm when he reflected on the boldness of the enterprise, to give him the advantage of an University education. With Lady Emily's full concurrence, young Southern, as soon as ever he was deemed by Mr. Hylton duly qualified, was established as a Sizar at a very quiet and obscure College at Cambridge, with a few affectionate cautions from Mr. Hylton as to the course of conduct to be pursued there. Without distinctly intimating why, he told Southern to regard himself as an orphan, whose continuance at the University depended solely on the successful use which he might make of such rare advantages as had been most providentially conferred upon him. Good Mr. Hylton's heart yearned towards the modest youth while saying all this, which he felt to be indeed needless; and, while looking at his pale countenance, the lineaments of which betokened humility and goodness, while his dark eyes beamed with unerring indications of intellect and genius, Mr.

Hylton's thoughts reverted to a scene of the youth's early childhood, when he lay uneasy, and yet unconscious of his position, in the lap of his manacled and fettered father—of a father about to swing from the gibbet as a foul and cowardly murderer!

“Well, my good lad,” said Mr. Hylton, on first leaving him in his tiny room, “give me thy hand: God's good Providence hath brought thee hither; and may His smile be upon thee! Ay, lad,” Mr. Hylton added, more firmly grasping his hand, “the smile of Him *from whom cometh every good and perfect gift!* God bless thee, my lad! One day thou wilt perhaps see a very angel upon this earth, whose finger hath pointed thy way hither: but of this inquire and speak never a word to any one, as thou lovest me, and wouldst remain here!”

Southern listened to all this with a beating heart, full of tenderness, gratitude, fear, hope, wonder, but, withal, a sustaining sense of capacity and power: alone, as he was amongst so many—the great, the wealthy, the proud—all of whom, whatever their disposition, would, had they known who he was, have spurned him, or shrunk from him as one in whose veins ran the black and corrupted blood of hereditary crime! Poor youth! Happy, happy, was thy ignorance; and humane the object and purpose of those who placed thee in it!

Another there was, however, of nearly the same age as Southern—but how differently circumstanced!—with what different feelings regarded by those who surrounded him!—whose hearts he gladdened by displaying true nobility of disposition, as he grew up, and unequivocally superior intellectual endowments. This was the grandson of the Earl of Milverstoke, the youthful Viscount Alkmond. Living, as he had, in the presence of those who regarded him, so to speak, as the *very apple of their eye*—watching his every movement with lynx-like vigilance and unutterable love—yet had he breathed the pure and invigorating air of moral and religious discipline. He was regarded by those who surrounded him as indeed a precious trust from Heaven—an earnest and pledge of forgiveness and happiness, here and hereafter! His ripening intellect was trained and cultivated by the most consummate skill that could be pressed into the responsible service. His temper was calm, mild, self-denying; and so unaffected and humble, that he seemed really scarcely aware of the resplendent position which he occupied, and was apparently destined to grace and dignify. Oh, with what thrilling emotions of solicitous fondness, of well-warranted exultation, would his widowed mother gaze on his noble features, and the winning but pensive smile that played over them! Who but she could tell the feelings with

which she often detected in them the highest expression that she had ever seen in those of his unhappy, departed father ! Who could sound the awful depth of those reflections into which the Earl of Milverstoke would sink, when he regarded that son of a murdered father—and *he* the son of a father—that grandson of one who—the Earl would tremble when thoughts like these presented themselves—thoughts which flung him prostrate before the awful footstool of Mercy—and even there would he lie quaking with terror, yet—God be thanked !—*not in despair*.

Every year were Mr. and Mrs Hylton visitors at the picturesque and splendid residence to which the Earl had betaken himself, on quitting Milverstoke. The presence of that Minister of God served at once to humble and exalt those to whom he came, radiant with the pure influences of piety and virtue—which, in his meek presence, shone, as it were, before their very eyes. And, when absent, still, year after year came from him many missives of earnest and faithful teaching: soul-subduing, soul-elevating; entering into his very inner man, and seeking to expel all that could defile the temple of the living God. And he had, indeed, at length sapped the foundations of PRIDE: the pillar that had stood upon it, in black and hideous strength and height, had fallen, and lay crushed in

visible fragments around. Yet was there another, apparently adamant and inaccessible — alas! still continued the Earl utterly UNFORGIVING! And the subtle fiend, who ever hovered around so coveted a victim—to him invisible, but visible to the eyes of the Minister of Christ—supplied reasons that seemed unanswerable for perseverance in blind and deadly infatuation. In vain presented Mr. Hylton to the shuddering averted eye of the Earl, moving pictures of the miserable *father* of the heart-broken exile—of blameless life, of exalted piety, of unswerving faith, of utter forgiveness of injuries: the more vivid the colouring, the nearer came the awe-inspiring figure—the hastier and angrier was the retreat of the inexorable Earl. And that poor exile himself—him also fearlessly presented Mr. Hylton to the Earl as an image of resignation and Christian forgiveness: but all in vain—the Earl recoiled from the approach in mingled disgust and horror. And Mr. Hylton's last weapon, which with dauntless aim he drove home—*What if all this time he be innocent as your Lordship's self!*—even that, too, failed of its purpose. Mr. Hylton's steadfast perseverance, year after year, did not, however, exasperate the Earl, who loved and revered one whom he might well style—incomparable. The finest living in his gift (and he had several) he most

earnestly and affectionately pressed upon Mr. Hylton—but in vain.

“No, dear my Lord,” said he, “give it to a younger, stronger, a better man. *Here* pitched I my tent long ago; and here will I remain and take my rest, with those whom I love, whom one by one I have followed lovingly to the dust—my people!—my flock!—my children! Here are they all! Here sweetly sleep they; and by-and-bye I hope to slumber beside them, till we all rise together again from the dust.”

When the Earl got the letter that contained these moving expressions, he took it out with him, and read it often, as he walked in solitude for many hours. “This man’s foot,” said he, “I could see placed upon my paltry coronet of dust; for on HIS brow wears he one that gleams with heavenly brightness!”

Hopeless indeed seemed Mr. Hylton’s efforts: but the stake which he played for was one of tremendous magnitude; and he dared not cease his exertions—he dared not despair: it was a contest that was sublime; one upon which angels looked down—ay, into which they entered unseen—one on which victory would be celebrated in eternity.

Many brilliant suitors sought the hand of Lady Almond, but in vain: her heart could feel no second love, but was either buried in the untimely grave of

her husband, or absorbed with the treasure which survived him. She was still lovely—pensive in her loveliness—and meet companion to the father of him whose loss she mourned : and she was in time his only companion—for Lady Emily, peerless in beauty, ay, and in purity and goodness, on coming forth from her stately privacy into the world, found herself surrounded by those who paid an eager and enthusiastic homage to her charms ; and it was not long before the contest ended—the fortress surrendered at discretion ; and fair Lady Emily became the Duchess of Waverdale—her lord, her slave ; she, his vowed servant, his sweet and absolute mistress ! The link which bound them together, passed through the hallowing hands of Mr. Hylton.

Little difficulty felt the beautiful Duchess in obtaining the Duke's sanction to her arrangement with Mr. Hylton, for the support of young Southern, both at school, and at College ; but the alarmed perplexity into which fell both the Duchess and Mr. Hylton, on hearing of the destination of the young Lord Alkmond to Cambridge, instead of Oxford, where the Earl of Milverstone had been educated, may be easily imagined. Mr. Hylton, good soul, took the earliest opportunity which he could find, of sounding to the Earl the praises of Oxford ; which he did with such remarkable energy

and pertinacity, as not a little surprised his Lordship; and once or twice even drew from him what was very rarely seen, a smile, as he good-naturedly reproached Mr. Hylton with ingratitude and undutifulness towards his *Alma Mater*.

The Earl heartily, and very justly, loved Oxford, where he himself had contended successfully for honours; but the last and greatest resident tutor of Lord Alkmond was a Cambridge man; and had made such stimulating representations concerning Lord Alkmond's mathematical talents and acquirements, and the probability which there was of their conducting him to the highest point of academical distinction, that the Earl resolved on having his grandson entered at Cambridge. And to Cambridge, therefore, he went; little dreaming he, the while, of the tremulous anxiety which his going thither occasioned.

Mr. Hylton and the Duchess had some anxious correspondence on the question of intrusting at once, in confidence, to Lord Alkmond, the secret by which they were themselves so disquieted. They finally determined, however, not to do so; and perhaps wisely. And on another cognate matter were they also agreed—to keep Mr. Southern in the dark as to the position which he occupied with reference to the young Lord Alkmond; with whom—a nobleman, and member of the

leading College in the University—possibly, he—an obscure Sizar of an obscure College—might never happen to come into personal contact.

Sixteen years after the cruel death of Lord Alkmond, the persevering efforts of Mr. Hylton to overcome the unrelenting and bitterly unchristian feelings of the Earl towards the supposed murderer of his son were at length crowned with success, to Mr. Hylton's unspeakable joy and satisfaction. But it was only because his pious efforts had been aided by the afflicting hand which it had pleased God to lay upon the Earl, who was brought very nearly to the door of death, and then saw around him the uncompromising minister of religion, his own daughter, and his widowed daughter-in-law, all of whom, with gentle, and at length irresistible persuasion and prayer, urged him to utter (which uttering, they knew he would feel) the word which would open to him that door of mercy, which otherwise must remain for ever—yes, FOR EVER closed.

“Come forth from that wretched hard-heartedness of thine,” said Mr. Hylton, with solemn energy, “and thankfully and reverently echo the awful language of the Saviour of mankind, in his agony on the cross, ‘FATHER, FORGIVE THEM !’ Oh, how art thou hereafter to stand before Him asking for mercy, whose example thou didst on earth disregard, and disregarding, de-

spise? Awake! awake from thy horrible and deadly trance! *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!*"

"Oh, my brother! oh, my teacher!" said the Earl, devoutly, and with a holy transport, "the scales are falling from mine eyes! Pray for me!—pray for me! I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes!"

And they did pray for him, and with him, and the offended majesty of God was appeased, through an ever-living Intercessor. From his foot there fell the last fetter that bound him in the dungeon of the Prince of Darkness.

"I humbly and fearfully FORGIVE!" he said—and the light of Heaven fell upon his benighted soul, scaring away for ever the fiends of darkness! A sudden peace pervaded his long-troubled breast.

"Oh, ever merciful God! it is sufficient! Keep Thou thy servant in this spirit, and in this faith!" solemnly faltered Mr. Hylton, kneeling at his bedside, where also knelt the weeping figures of the Duchess, and Lady Alkmond.

Yes, the grace had been given—the long, fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man had availed much,—and, oh, stupendous, inconceivable change! due only to heavenly potency! a whole nature had been transformed—a great spirit, long downward sinking, sprung

like lightning out of the awful abyss of condemnation and despair—and stood, trembling, but firm, upon the Rock of Ages, with humble uplifted eye, on which streamed light and glory from the Sun of Righteousness.

“Oh, why,” thought afterwards the Earl, “hath this been so long delayed? Why have I passed thus far through this earth, a blasted wilderness, that might have bloomed and blossomed as the rose,—a very paradise around me!”

That sickness was not unto death, but had been otherwise ordered by the supreme disposer of events; and not very long after this blessed change had come over the Earl of Milverstoke, whose very countenance betokened it, there happened an event so utterly unlooked for and signal, as to demand a faithful record of it.

For the benefit of the sea air, Lord Milverstoke, after seventeen years' absence from the scene, to his Lordship dismal enough, of those events which have formed the subject of this history, returned to Milverstoke Castle—oh, what an altered man! It might almost be said that it was in a stern spirit of martyrdom that he returned to a spot so surrounded with associations of grief and horror. But he resolved to dare all, to bear all, and in a spirit of voluntary, self-den-

ing humiliation. And, indeed, his very soul shuddered within him as he passed through the village, and drove along the road lying *in that horrible wood*—to his long-deserted Castle, soon standing before him with an aspect of gloomy, nay, terrible magnificence.

“Courage!” said Mr. Hylton, who, at his request, was standing ready to receive him as he alighted, the Earl grasping his proffered hand, with an almost convulsive energy, and involuntarily closing his eyes. “You are entering this great and ancient house,” whispered Mr. Hylton, “possibly more blessed by Heaven than ever entered any of your ancestors.”

“Oh, Mr. Hylton!” faltered the Earl, “it may be, it may be!”—and the Earl took off his hat with an air of profound reverence, and for a moment stood still in the hall through which he was passing.

His hair had become white as snow; his noble features wore an expression of sorrowful dignity; but their once haughty frowning sternness was gone for ever, having vanished with the temper and feelings in which it had originated. His tall commanding figure, once erect as an arrow, now was bent beneath the burden of age and grief, and his gait and step were feeble. But what gentleness in his eyes, what gentleness in the tones of his voice, appeared to those now around him, who remembered the proud Earl of Mil-

verstoke of a former day! And there was his daughter, still blooming with beauty, and the Duke, her husband, and her children—all there to welcome him!—and his daughter-in-law and his grandson—all of whom he embraced, but especially the last, with a tenderness that could find no utterance.

That evening, before the assembled family and household, Mr. Hylton resumed his functions as the Earl's Chaplain, in the presence of a very grave auditory, collected in that chamber, the library, which had formerly witnessed scenes so stormy, and so different. Mr. Hylton read the ninetieth Psalm, and the prayers, with soul-subduing solemnity; for his spirit was indeed moved within him by the mighty contrast which he beheld between NOW and THEN, by the humble but lively hope which he felt, that old things had passed away, and all things had become new.

“Why, what can this be, Mary?” said Mr. Hylton, as Mrs. Hylton placed in his hands, on his return one day from a walk in the village, after paying a visit to old Ayliffe, who still occupied his own cottage, a grateful pensioner on the bounty, conveyed through Mr. Hylton, of the Lady Emily of a former day, the brilliant and celebrated Duchess of the present—who, with beauty in nowise faded, but only perfectly ma-

tured, retained all her characteristic simplicity and loveliness of character.

“What can His Majesty have thought it worth his while to send, in his royal pleasure, to the Vicar of Milverstoke?” He alluded to the words “On His Majesty’s service,” standing on a packet of much greater than the usual dimensions; and in the corner was the signature “Mordaunt,”—that of the Secretary of State, Lord Mordaunt, the third successor to Lord Farnborough, in whose time he had communicated, in the character of Mr. Under Secretary Wylnington, with Mr. Hylton. The letter contained a large enclosure, to which a note from the Under Secretary called Mr. Hylton’s attention; such enclosure being a copy of a communication which had just been received from the gentleman whose name it bore.

“MY LORD,

“I lose no time in informing your Lordship of a somewhat remarkable fact which has just been communicated to me, officially, by the Chaplain of the prison here. This morning, a person named Isaac Hart, otherwise Jonas Hundle, was executed, pursuant to the statute 18 Geo. II. c. 27, for stealing a piece of cotton goods, value ten shillings, from a bleaching-field in this county. There was every reason to believe

that this was a second offence. Yesterday evening the prisoner, being much troubled in his mind, desired to see the Chaplain, to whom, I rejoice to say, he heartily acknowledged the justice of the sentence under which he was going to suffer. And he then went on to speak to the following effect (the words I copy from those which the Reverend Chaplain took down, from the prisoner's lips, and which afterwards he signed himself, by affixing thereto his mark, in the presence of the Chaplain aforesaid, and the Governor of the gaol), that is to say,—

“ ‘ I, who am to die in the morning, most justly for my many sins, am not Isaac Hart, but Jonas Hundle, formerly living far away from this. And it was I that did kill and murder my Lord Milverstoke's son, for which one Ayliffe was taken, and condemned to die, but is now transported, and possibly dead. I did it with one Giles Armstrong, my brother-in-law, thinking never to kill the Lord's son, whom we knew not, nor knowing, would have harmed, having no cause, that I knew of, for so doing ; nor knowing to this day how he came ever into the wood that night, so as to be killed. I and Armstrong (who hath died five years ago) did determine to kill Master Godbolt, the head keeper, for divers ills that he had done us, having shot Giles's brother, and transported

another ; wherefore we purposed to kill him, and I did with mine own hand strike him, as I thought, having heard that he was to be that night in the wood alone. I and Armstrong were together, but the young Lord came up to me before him, and I, thinking him, in the dark, to be Godbolt, and he walking quick, did strike him (for which God forgive me) with the coulter of a plough which Giles did take that evening from Farmer Hopkins's plough, and I did, for fear's sake, when I had struck Godbolt (as I thought it was), and lest I should be found out, thrust the coulter into a hole in a hollow tree hard by, where now, please God, it may be found, if yon tree do yet stand in that wood. And we both did get off as best we might, hearing steps, and Giles did drop over the cliff where lowest, but I ran round, and we two did go along by the sea till we got to Gaffer Strong's house, and so home by the road, no one seeing us that we knew of. And this is the very truth thereof, and I did hear Adam Ayliffe hereof tried, being present in Court during that time, but fearing to speak, lest I should have to die ; but I heard him not sentenced, for my heart did fail me, and hoping he may be now alive, may God have mercy on my sinful soul, which is justly to leave this world to-morrow morning, having done many other wicked things, but none so

great as this that I now tell, and that for which I am to die to-morrow, which did to me seem hard, till I bethought me of the great wickedness of robbing people that were forced to have their goods put out in open air for to bleach, and this murder which I did on the young Lord, that another was to suffer for, but mercifully did not ; all which is true, as I die to-morrow, and hope to be saved hereafter, knowing nothing can save me here from the consequence of my evil and most horrid life. God bless all Christian people, and forgive me, dying penitent. Amen.

“ ‘ JONAS [X] HUNDLE, *his mark.*

“ ‘ *Witnesses.* GREGORY DURDEN, *Chaplain.*

ABRAHAM HIGSON, *Governor.*’

“ Just before the prisoner had his irons struck off, he was asked by the aforesaid Governor and Chaplain, whether all that he had over-night said was true, having first had read over to him the above, word for word ; when he said it was true as the Gospel : and again Mr. Durden did ask him just before he suffered, and he did most solemnly declare to the truth thereof ; and so he died. And, respectfully begging forgiveness for thus troubling your Lordship, yet knowing your Lordship’s desire to help the cause of justice, I have thought fit, on great consideration, to

send off this forthwith to your Lordship, being, my Lord,

“Your Lordship’s most obedient, humble servant,

“HUMPHREY HARRIS, *Clerk of the Peace.*”

“My Lord Mordaunt,” said Mr. Hylton’s correspondent, “was sure that Mr. Hylton would give his best attention to the enclosed document; not merely as a magistrate for the county, and a gentleman anxious for the due administration of justice, but also as one who formerly had taken great personal interest in the case of Adam Ayliffe above mentioned, as Lord Mordaunt well remembered; who relied on Mr. Hylton’s taking steps, without delay, to confirm or contradict, as far as might be practicable, the extraordinary statements of the deceased convict Hart *alias* Hundle, in order that, if Adam Ayliffe were yet living, justice should be done in the matter, as far as yet might be.”

“Oh, Mary, Mary!” said Mr. Hylton, after he had somewhat recovered from the astonishment into which this letter had thrown him, “that hath now happened which I ever felt and knew within myself would happen, before I died!”

“Yes, my dear, ’tis indeed strange and most wonderful, if it be true; but stir not herein before you

have found the coulter in the tree spoken of; and also, as Hopkins is alive, learnt from that good soul whether coulter he lost at that time, that he now can remember."

"That is all reasonable enough, and true; but the matter is already absolutely determined. I have that within me, Mary, which tells me that so it is, as I have ever felt that so it would prove to be; but what you say shall be done."

Good Mr. Hylton could no longer mount his horse, and ride about, as twenty years before he used to do, but was somewhat feeble, and had gotten a gig to carry him easily and quietly about, as he might require. And in this gig he had soon placed himself, with his old gardener; and he drove off to his nearest brother magistrate, and then to the clerk to the justices, a most shrewd and practised attorney. To all of them he read the marvellous letter which had brought him to them; and then they agreed to accompany him at a given hour that afternoon, to Milver-stoke Wood, and search for the instrument of murder alleged to be there lying hid. But Mr. Hylton also determined, for the sake of more absolute security of evidence, to have with them still other witnesses of what might be discovered. Wherefore it happened, that about three o'clock that afternoon a

party of at least eight people met together in Milver-stoke Wood, several of whom were well acquainted with the hollow tree spoken of in the confession of Hart *alias* Hundle; and to be sure, when they had come up to the tree, there was a hole in the trunk some four feet above the ground, and quite capable of receiving what was alleged to have been thrust into it. The head bailiff, one of the party, put his hand into the hole amidst excited silence, but felt nothing. "The hole," said he, "seems deep—the tree cannot stand many more high winds, so hollow as it is. I will soon mend this matter." With this, he sent off his man, who was present, to the woodman's house, not far off; and before long the two returned, with an axe, which they plied heartily, and soon slit down nearly three feet of the half-rotten trunk; when out sprung a large snake (which had doubtless crept in through a hole at the foot of the trunk), startling everybody away, and getting out of sight before it could be killed. Before those who had been thus stirred had quite recovered themselves, Mr. Hylton, too much absorbed with the object of his errand to take much notice of what had just happened, put his own hand into the hole (careless at the moment of the possibility that other snakes were there), and, sure enough! amidst expressions of wonder, and even awe, from all present,

drew forth the coulter of a plough! Mr. Hylton, holding in his hands the dismal memorial of the black transaction which has been commemorated in this history, stood greatly moved before his companions. At length, "My friends," said he, very solemnly, "this seems to be the doing of Almighty God; let us acknowledge it with awe and thankfulness!" As he said this, he uncovered his venerable head, his example being followed by all present; and for some moments a dead silence prevailed, during which thoughts passed through the mind of each, not to be forgotten, nor easily to be expressed. They then closely examined the rusty iron, but could discover nothing upon it that would warrant the belief, after so great a lapse of time, that the instrument bore any marks of the bloody use to which it had been applied. Mr. Hylton himself took possession of it, covering it up in a cloth, which he had provided against the occasion; and his next object was to see old Hopkins, whose farm, now managed by his son-in-law, was not far off, and lay in Mr. Hylton's way home. He and his brother magistrate went into the farm-house, where sat the old man smoking in the chimney-corner, cheerful and intelligent, and able to hear everything that was said to him. Mr. Hylton, having quietly led the conversation to the time of the great murder, which, with all its

incidents, seemed quite fresh in the old man's mind, asked him whether he had ever, about that time, chanced to miss a coulter from a plough of his.

"Ay, ay, I think," said he, rubbing his forehead for a few moments, "I do bethink me I did, and somewhere, too, about that time; nay, now I do remember that I did truly lose one, and thought that one of those Armstrongs must have taken it—a sad family they were—but I never did see or hear more of the matter."

"Should you know that coulter, were you to see it now, as matter of curiosity?" said Mr. Hylton.

"What! now? That coulter?—No, no; not after all these years, hardly," replied the old man, smiling. "I got another coulter when t'other was wanting, and thought no more of it; but I've often thought that Giles did me that trick; he were a bad one, I always thought."

"Did you ever know one Hundle?"

"What—Jonas Hundle? the lad that choused poor Adam Ayliffe about the hare? Ay!—A sorry knave was he, I ever did think—he and Giles were always, as I may say, together, and never doing good. Glad was I to get rid of 'em—and I don't know what came of 'em, nor ever cared, not I!"

"Well—I can tell thee—Jonas was hanged, some two hundred miles off, last week."

“ Hanged ! And only last week ? He hath had a long hide and seek with Satan (saving your Reverence) —and what might he go for, at the last ? ”

“ He robbed a bleaching-ground.”

“ Why, what’s that ? ” said the farmer, scratching his head — “ we’ve no such things in these parts, I’m thinking.”

∴ “ And what would you say, my friend, if I told you that just before he died, he confessed a great murder.”

Hopkins suddenly took his pipe out of his mouth, and stared silently at Mr. Hylton, who proceeded —

“ Ay, and that he did it with that same coulter of yours that I have spoken of.”

“ Lord have mercy upon us ! ” exclaimed Hopkins, faintly, dropping his pipe on the hearth — “ why — it — was not — the young Lord — the Lord Alkmond — surely ! surely ! ”

“ Ay, but he dying did declare it was, and that he did it with his own hand, and with that same coulter, which is here.”

Hopkins got up from his chair with a long-drawn sigh, and walked a step or two about the room, with an amazed air.

“ This is it,” said Mr. Hylton, beginning to uncover it.

“ Phew ! ” cried Hopkins, earnestly — “ I wish it were

not in *my* house, here : it takes my breath off—it does, gentlemen ! But—if it be my coulter, look ye, gentlemen, at one end—I do now well remember that it was broken, and so would not hold on, and was to have been taken to the smith's :—is it so ?”

It was, verily ! And Hopkins saw and identified it—but would not touch the horrid instrument of murder, which Mr. Hylton, himself with shuddering reluctance, took home with him. Further minute inquiry afforded complete corroboration to every part of Hundle's confession.

Godbolt, the head keeper, was dead : but he was in the wood on the night of the murder, going his rounds, and he it was who had stumbled over the body of Lord Alkmond ; who, it now appeared, had been mistaken for him, owing to the obscurity of the night, and the sanguinary impetuosity of the assassins. And though true it was that Hundle had remained in the neighbourhood till some time subsequently to the trial, apparently occupied only as an occasional farming-servant, yet a few months afterwards he left, and was never seen or heard of any more in that part of the country. It appeared, also, that Giles Armstrong, his brother-in-law, ceased, about the same time, to be known in those parts ; and there was every reason to believe that he was, as stated by Hundle, dead.

So then, poor Adam Ayliffe was innocent! innocent as the unborn child! The discovery, together with the reflections which it occasioned, was to Mr. Hylton perfectly overwhelming. It was, indeed, an awful mystery; an inscrutable dispensation of Providence; one which baffled the impious daring of human conjecture; but was assuredly reconcilable, though our limited and disturbed faculties should be unable to perceive it, with the ineffable wisdom and justice of the Almighty maker and governor of the world. When, on the ensuing morning, Mr. Hylton went to Old Ayliffe to communicate to him this extraordinary and most affecting intelligence, he greatly feared the effect which it might produce upon the venerable sufferer of nearly a twenty years' martyrdom. He found the old man alone in his cottage, reading that Book which had been long the only solace of his life; one which either gave him a clue to the course of God's Providence in human affairs, or conferred upon him the blessing of a composed resignation, an implicit faith and confidence that one day would make it known that He *had done all things well*. Deep in that old man's heart were engraved the solemnizing and consolatory words of the Apostle: *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then, face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know, even as also I am known*. God and his doings are

at present surrounded with darkness, often impent-
trable: but otherwise shall it be hereafter—when He
shall be seen to have here been, where He was
not known to be!—Therefore the old man received
this amazing intelligence, the first shock over, with
calmness and dignity. “God is good,” said he,
“that hath given me to see this day, to hear these
tidings, as a ray of sunshine on the short path which
leads me to my home yonder,” and he pointed, through
his little window, to the churchyard. “It will not
shorten, nor could the want of it have lengthened, my
sleep in the dust. This old body of mine hath in-
creasing attraction to the dust: I feel the hour coming
when it must drop, when the *earthly house of this tabernacle*
shall be dissolved: and I leave it cheerfully here, to
enter *a building of God, an house not made with hands,*
eternal in the heavens. For in this tabernacle,” continued
he solemnly, “*I do groan, being burthened: not for that I*
would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may
be swallowed up in life! Links have I that yet bind
me to this earth, but they will presently melt and dis-
solve away, and I escape. My son, mine only son,
whom I loved, hath been offered up this twenty years
upon my heart, an offering unto God: when He un-
looseth him, I will receive him back thankfully, be it
but for a moment. Ay, let me see my son, my son

Adam, and I depart in peace, knowing that God hath heard my prayer. His mother hath long been dust; so will be soon his father : so ere long will he be."

Here he paused long, and seemed to have fallen into a reverie, which Mr. Hylton's feelings permitted him not to disturb. "I reckon his hair will be long gone grey; turning white; and his face sad and worn: and so will it be with Sarah; but—I shall know them!" said the old man, his sad low voice such as would have broken a heart of stone. "Doth my Lord know of this?" he presently inquired, gazing with momentary stateliness at Mr. Hylton, who answered in the negative. "I felt, then, Satan, for a moment; but he is gone: God be thanked!" said he, with his former solemn and affecting tranquillity of tone and manner.

That day Mr. Hylton wrote a letter to the Secretary of State, explaining the complete verification he had obtained, of the confession which had been made by the deceased miscreant Hundle.

From Ayliffe Mr. Hylton went direct to the Earl of Milverstoke; deeming it of great importance to obtain, before answering the Secretary of State's letter, the hearty and decisive acquiescence of the Earl in the truth of the disclosure which had thus signally vindicated the innocence of one whom he was going down to the grave believing to be the murderer of his son.

The Earl's coach was standing at the Castle door when Mr. Hylton arrived, his Lordship being about to take his usual mid-day drive. Mr. Hylton was, however, shown immediately into the library, where the feeble Earl's valet, and another, were assisting in drawing on his Lordship's gloves, and preparing him to encounter the out-door air, which was keen and biting. Mr. Hylton's countenance showed that he came the bearer of some kind of serious intelligence: and on the Earl's inquiring, somewhat apprehensively, if such was the case, and being answered in the affirmative, he ordered his attendants instantly to withdraw—and then he and Mr. Hylton were alone.

“My grandson—is Alkmond well? Speak!” said the Earl, who had gone suddenly pale—“if anything has happened, let me, in pity, know at once”—

“No, no, my Lord; nought that I know of, nor have reason to fear. When last I heard, he was well—quite well—and going on to great distinction.”

“Then what hath happened? Speak, whatever it be. I am old and feeble now, and suspense doth make me shake inwardly, as though my soul were palsied. Speak, good Mr. Hylton”—continued the Earl, earnestly, drawing near to Mr. Hylton, who, while the Earl was speaking, had been hastily considering which was the best mode of breaking the matter

to one whose nerves were, indeed, as he had said, shattered.

“My dear Lord Milverstoke,” said he, with a frank air — “we are both now very far on in years, and have seen no little of God’s dealing with mankind, to discipline and subdue our unruly and wicked hearts and wills. For wise and awful purposes of His own, His government of man is one of deep mystery; His doings are only partially revealed—sometimes never, in this dim scene of our trial. But He doth now and then condescend unto our weakness and blindness; and now shall I show you one marvellous and most signal doing of His. I pray your Lordship to be calm while I speak,” he continued—observing the Earl’s gathering excitement—“calm as was that aged saint whom I have just quitted, when I told him of what I tell your Lordship now. Oh, my dear Lord! Adam Ayliffe—poor banished Adam Ayliffe”—

“Is he dead, then?” asked the Earl gravely, appearing suddenly calm, as if relieved from apprehension—
“And if he be—how was his end? What said he, before quitting to give his great account?”

“How feels your Lordship towards him?” said Mr. Hylton, glancing searchingly at the Earl, and removing from his pocket-book, and opening, the Secretary of State’s letter.

“I have, God be my witness, no ill-will towards him,

my wretched brother sinner. Malice hath long since died within me, as you do know, dear friend Mr. Hylton; and I feel! alas!--who am I that should bear malice to another!" said Lord Milverstoke, with a perceptible shudder.

"Ah, my good Lord, I must now, then, tell you all! Adam Ayliffe is innocent—innocent as am I—of poor Lord Alkmond's murder." The Earl's face went suddenly of a ghastly whiteness, and in his eye, fixed intensely on Mr. Hylton, apprehension was evidently mingled with some of the sternness, and even fierceness, of a former day. But he seemed resolved, as Mr. Hylton judged from his rigid and compressed lips, to listen in silence; so Mr. Hylton proceeded, firmly and with his peculiar and impressive emphasis: "The Providence of God, my dear Lord, hath at length cleared up this mystery, and all is revealed." The Earl sunk back in his seat, faintly asking for water, which Mr. Hylton caused to be immediately procured. When his Lordship had drunk a little, which Mr. Hylton gave him, he asked for a little wine to be added, which also was done; and then he whispered to Mr. Hylton to order those out who had come in to answer his summons. Within a few moments they were again alone.

"That—letter: is it from abroad?"—he gasped, with tremulous eagerness.

“No, my Lord—no: you have no need to fear any thing from the quarter you think of, where your munificence hath long, long ago extinguished all claim on your Lordship—but this letter is from the Secretary of State, and enclareth the confession of a guilty wretch, hanged within these last few days only, and who, to the Chaplain attending him, did in his last moments most solemnly and explicitly confess that he had done this foul murder; and proof that he spake truly, the Providence of God hath placed in our reach, and I have got that proof: with mine own eyes have I seen, with mine own hands have I felt, with mine own ears have I heard it! Oh, the wonderful”—

“My friend—my friend—your voice fails; I have not heard much of what you have been saying! Let me hear again, and somewhat louder,” said the Earl, leaning forward, and speaking in a very feeble tone, his eyes also gazing languidly at Mr. Hylton, who had, in truth, been speaking most deliberately, and with rather more distinctness and loudness than usual. He repeated what he had said—and as he went on, the Earl closed his eyes, and shook his head gently and mournfully, his snowy attenuated hands resting on his knees, which were trembling visibly.

“My Lord—I perceive that you are not able now to hear me—that you are indisposed”—

“Now ! now ! or it may be—never !” said the Earl, opening his eyes, and gazing with a steadfastness and energy at Mr. Hylton, which he had not seen for years, and betokened the great effort of the Earl’s will, which produced it. Mr. Hylton then read the letter which he had received from London—Lord Milverstoke’s eye being all the while fixed upon him with unwavering intensity ; and also while he explained, as briefly but pointedly as possible, the steps which he had taken to obtain, and by which he had obtained, complete corroboration of the matters which had been spoken of by the murderer. When he had concluded, the Earl heaved a succession of deep-drawn sighs : and then tremulously said, “Is all this in judgment, or in mercy ?”

“In mercy, dear my Lord ! in mercy !” answered Mr. Hylton, with a brightenning countenance and a cheerful voice,—“in you, spared to advanced age, I see before me only a monument of mercy and goodness ! Had you continued till now, deaf to the teaching of His Holy Spirit—dead to His gracious influences—hateful, relentless, and vindictive—this which has now occurred would, to my poor thinking, have appeared to speak only in judgment, uttering condemnation in your ears, and sealing your eyes in judicial blindness ! But you have been enabled to hear a still small voice,

whose melting accents have pierced through your deaf ear, and broken a heart once obdurate in pride and hopelessly unforgiving. Plainly I speak, dear my Lord, for my mission I feel to be now no longer one of terror, but of consolation! What hath happened is awful, but awful in mercy only, and condescension!"

"All this—all this—to a worm of the earth, guilty—utterly worthless," faltered the Earl.

"Nay, call that not worthless which God himself hath deigned to redeem! which he hath endowed with immortality! and placed here to become fitted for eternal happiness!"

The Earl spoke not for some minutes.

"Twenty years!—nearly twenty years!—twenty years' exile and misery!—and injustice!" he presently exclaimed, clasping his hands over his forehead. "Oh, what an eternity of anguish, upon earth!"

"Afflict not yourself unnecessarily, my dear Lord, nor in vain. Attribute not to your agency that which is caused only by the unavoidably imperfect administration of justice—and for which you are not responsible, before either God or man. It was not you who placed this unfortunate man in the circumstances which led him into the mortal peril from which the Providence of God only rescued him. Nor was it you who judged or condemned him: yet only your own heart can tell you,

how you have stood before God, towards this your brother, in spirit and in intention!"

"Oh, my heart condemns! hath terribly condemned me! Oh, fiend that I have been! And I to be, of all men, thus exacting and vindictive!"

"These, my Lord, are painful, but wholesome thoughts, and I dare not interrupt them."

"Alas! alas! Mr. Hylton, were I to dwell upon them, I should despair; my eyes turn ever back upon the past, and *there* still gleams upon me vengeance unappeased!" He paused. "Dare I ask—what says poor Ayliffe—Adam Ayliffe, the father?"

"He seems but half with us, my Lord, on earth! As though he had lingered only to hear these glad tidings, before descending into the dust!"

"Twenty years! twenty years hath he, too, spent in misery and wrong!"

"Twenty years have they been, my Lord, of resignation, of faith, which have raised and purified his noble soul—for noble, my Lord, even in the language of men, it is—from almost all dross of earth! Never one word has there fallen from him during those long twenty years, that angels might not joyfully carry up to Heaven as tokens of his fitness to join them!"

"Oh, venerable man! Think you that he would

receive one whose head, aged as his own, is bowed with shame, while his, is erect in virtue and nobleness?"

Mr. Hylton was moved almost to tears at the spectacle which was before his mind's eye, of these two old men meeting for the first, and it might be for the only, time upon earth: and his offer to accompany his Lordship at once to the cottage, the Earl eagerly accepted, and they both took their departure. As the carriage approached, the Earl showed no little agitation at the prospect of the coming interview.

"Yonder," said Mr. Hylton exultingly, "yonder is the humble place where dwells still, and for but a little longer, one whom angels there have ministered to; with whom God hath there ever communion;—and it is a hallowed spot!"

The Earl spoke not; and in a few minutes' time, he was to be seen, supported by Mr. Hylton and a servant, closely approaching the cottage door, another preceding him to announce his arrival, and standing uncovered outside the door, as the Earl entered it; his lordly master himself uncovering, and bowing low as he stepped within, accompanied by Mr. Hylton, who led him up to old Ayliffe, saying, "Adam, here comes one to speak with you—my Lord Milverstone—who saith that he hath long, in heart, done to you and yours injustice; and hath come hither

to tell you so." The Earl trembled on Mr. Hylton's arm while he said this, and stood uncovered, gazing with an air of reverence at the old man, who, when they entered, was sitting near the fire, leaning on his staff beside a table, on which stood his old Bible open, with his spectacles lying upon it, as though he had but just laid them there. He rose slowly as Mr. Hylton finished speaking.

"My Lord," said he, solemnly, and standing more erectly than he had stood for years, "we be now both very old men, and God hath not spared us thus long for nothing."

"Ay, Adam Ayliffe, indeed it is so! Will you forgive me, and take my hand?" said the Earl faintly, advancing his right hand.

"Ay, my Lord—ay, in the name of God! feeling that I have had somewhat to forgive! For a father am I, and a father *wast* thou, my Lord! Here, since it hath been asked for, is my hand, that never was withheld from man that kindly asked for it; and my heart goes out to thee with it! God bless thee, my Lord, in these thine old and feeble days—old and feeble are we both, *and the grasshopper is a burthen to us!*"

"Let me sit down, my friend," said the Earl gently. "I am feebler than thou; and be thou seated also!"

They both sat down opposite to each other, Mr. Hylton looking on in silence. "God may forgive me (and *may* He, of His infinite mercy!) — thou, my fellow-creature, mayst forgive me; but I cannot forgive myself, when I am here looking at thee. Good Adam! what hast thou not gone through these twenty years!" faltered the Earl.

"Ay, twenty years it is!" echoed Ayliffe solemnly, sighing deeply, and looking with sorrowful dignity at the Earl. "Life hath, during these twenty years, been a long journey, through a country dark and lonesome; but yet, here is the lamp that hath shone ever blessedly beside me, or I must have stumbled, and missed my way for ever, and perished in the valley of the shadow of death!" As he spoke, his eyes were fixed steadfastly on the Earl, and he placed his hand reverently upon the sacred volume beside him.

"Adam, God hath greatly humbled me, and mightily afflicted me!" said the Earl: "I am not what I was!"

"The scourge thou doubtless didst need, my Lord, and it hath been heavily laid upon thee; yet it is in mercy to thee, that thou art here, my good Lord!" said Ayliffe, with an eye and in a tone of voice belonging only to one who spoke with authority. "It is in mercy, too," he continued, "to me, that I am here to

receive and listen to thee ! I, too, have been perverse and rebellious, yet have I been spared !—And art thou, then, my Lord, in thy heart, satisfied that my poor son hath indeed suffered wrongfully ?”

“ Good Adam,” said the Earl, sorrowfully, and yet with dignity, “ I believe *now* that thy son is innocent, and ought not to have suffered ; yet God hath chosen that we should not see all things as He seeth them, Adam. The law, with which I had nought to do, went right, as the law of men goeth ; but, alas ! as for me, what a spirit hath been shown by me towards thee and thine ! Forgive me, Adam ! There is one here that knoweth more against me ”—the Earl turned towards Mr. Hylton with a look of gloomy significance—“ than I dare tell thee, of mine own awful guiltiness before God.”

“ He is merciful ! He is merciful !” said Ayliffe.

“ Wilt thou give me a token of thy forgiveness of a spirit most bitter and inhuman ?” said the Earl presently. “ If thy poor son Adam cometh home while I live, wilt thou speak with him, that he forgive me my cruel heart towards him ?—that he accept amends at my hands ?”

“ For amends, my Lord,” said Ayliffe, “ doubtless he will have none but those which God may provide for him ; and my son hath no claim upon thee for human

amends. His forgiveness I know that thou wilt have, for aught in which, my Lord, thou mayst have wronged him by uncharitableness; or he is not son of mine, and God hath afflicted him in vain."

Here Mr. Hylton interposed, observing the Earl grow very faint, and rose to assist him to the door.

"Good day, friend Adam, good day," said Lord Milverstoke, feebly, but cordially grasping the hand which Ayliffe tendered to him. "I will come hither again to see thee; but if I may not, wilt thou come yonder to me? Say yes, good Adam! for my days are fewer, I feel, than thine!"

"When thou canst not come to me, my good Lord, I will come to thee!" said Ayliffe, sadly, following the Earl to the door, and gazing after him till he had driven away.

That evening Mr. Hylton wrote off to the Secretary of State, fully detailing the corroboration which he had obtained of every part of Hundle's confession, and also communicating Lord Milverstoke's complete conviction of its truth, and his Lordship's extreme anxiety that not an hour should be lost in providing means for Ayliffe's immediate return home; Lord Milverstoke declaring his readiness to equip a vessel at his own expense, to proceed, at the earliest moment, abroad for that purpose. To this Mr. Hylton

added the firm conviction which he had from the first entertained of Ayliffe's innocence, and which had been strengthened by constant correspondence with him ever since his quitting England !

Mr. Hylton was summoned, by the Earl's desire, that evening to the Castle, which he had quitted scarcely two hours before, it being believed that his Lordship was dying ; and, indeed, Mr. Hylton was greatly affected when he saw the Earl, whom he verily believed to be indeed near his end, and who exhibited a solemn tranquillity, and expressed a mournful sympathy on behalf of old Ayliffe and his son, such as no one could have observed without being greatly moved. When Mr. Hylton returned, leaving the Earl a little revived, it was in company with his Lordship's solicitor, for whom a special messenger had been dispatched by his Lordship, immediately on his return to the Castle, from visiting Ayliffe's cottage. The solicitor was a very affable person, but on matters of business his lips were, so to speak, hermetically sealed. Not a word, therefore, passed between him and Mr. Hylton respecting anything that might have take place between him and the Earl, that evening. But his Lordship afterwards rallied from the prostration which had been occasioned by the agitation of that day ; and on the ensuing Sunday, Mr. Hylton had

the unspeakable satisfaction of seeing both the Earl and Old Aylyffe at church; and of administering to them, kneeling side by side, amongst others, the Sacrament. It was a sight that was long afterwards spoken of, by those who saw the two old men taking leave of each other, at the church door, with solemn courtesy, each, forgetful of mere earthly relations, uncovering to the other, in silence, his venerable head; shaking each other by the hand; and then the one assisted into his stately coach, the other into the small cart in which a friendly neighbour had conveyed him to the church. Then went they severally home, from the house of their common Father—the *Father of the spirits of all flesh*; who was no *respector of persons*! The spectacle of that day produced a deep and lasting impression on the beholders of it; but especially upon those who had lived long enough to remember, or had been told by those who did, what had taken place in Milverstoke some twenty years before.

Shortly after the happening of the events which have last been mentioned, there came on at Cambridge the exciting struggle for pre-eminence, to which the whole University had for some time been looking forward with an unusual degree of interest and curiosity, and which was concentrated on the two individuals who have been already mentioned—Viscount

Alkmond and Mr. Southern. Their respective partisans lacked, altogether, the calmness and good-nature of the two principals, who had had just that degree of intercourse with each other, before the hour of contest, which was calculated to excite reciprocal respect and apprehension. Each, it need hardly, perhaps, be said, continued in profound ignorance of the strange and critical position which his family occupied with respect to that of the other.

Lord Alkmond was stimulated to his uttermost exertion; for to him, the future head and representative of an ancient and noble family, what could be more desirable than intellectual distinction—the highest honours of a great University, won in fair fight with an antagonist so formidable, so worthy of being arduously conquered, as Mr. Southern? But if the pressure of such incentives were great upon Lord Alkmond—what would have been the effect of his knowing, besides, who that formidable competitor really was? The son, not of his father's murderer, but of the heart-broken man who, having been falsely accused of that murder, had nearly perished for it on the gibbet, and afterwards passed for it twenty years of his life in ignominious exile! Would Lord Alkmond have retired from the contest, overpowered by his feelings, and, under an impulse of chivalrous generosity, leaving

his innocent and unfortunate opponent to occupy the splendid post of distinction to which his great and admitted talents and acquirements entitled him?—Who can tell?

But suppose that Mr. Southern had discovered who he himself really was, and the position in which he and his family at that moment stood towards that of his distinguished opponent—what would he have done? Or, suppose him aware that amongst those who regarded him as an object of interest—as one of the two observed of all observers in that great academical struggle—was one who watched him with a straining eye and a well-nigh bursting heart—that long dishonoured exile, that falsely adjudged murderer, *his father*? Yet so it was! Him Nature nearly overpowered into forgetfulness of the solemnly pledged word of a Christian man, that he would not disclose himself to his son, till that son should have passed through the fiery ordeal into which he had entered, and on the issue of which depended all his earthly prospects. Yes, poor Ayliffe and his wife had indeed returned to their native country—to dreadful, but still dear, England!

Unable to resist the poor father's importunities, Mr. Hylton had accompanied him to Cambridge the day before that on which the contest commenced; and in

going thither had exacted the promise which has been mentioned above. Besides this, Mr. Hylton had most earnestly impressed upon him lessons of piety and gratitude, towards Him who out of seeming evil, brought, so often, good.

“Here, Adam, is your son, likely to become the foremost man of Cambridge University, and have all the honours and advantages attending such high distinction. He is now contending, as an equal, with the future Earl of Milverstoke, whom he may vanquish by the force of his talents and learning. Could this have been, in all human probability, if what has happened to you had not taken place? And had he been strong and well-formed like you, might he not have gone to the plough—or at all events been never what now he is?”

Ayliffe, now a grey-headed, care-worn, sad-hearted man, was silent. Oh, with what feelings did he first, at a distance, catch sight of his son! That son was in academical costume, walking alone with an air of deep thought for a while, till he was joined by—Lord Alkmond! Poor Ayliffe, who gazed at his son from the window of an inn, with Mr. Hylton beside him, was violently affected on seeing him, and wept like a child.

“How like his mother!” he exclaimed: and indeed that young man was.

“ And is not Lord Alkmond like his poor father ? ” inquired Mr. Hylton.

“ He is ! ” replied Ayliffe, with a cold shudder.

The contest lay entirely that year, as all had foreseen, between Lord Alkmond and Mr. Southern, both of whom far outstripped all other competitors ; and between those two, the issue was long doubtful, to all but one or two of the most experienced and able members of the University : who privately expressed a decided opinion as to which of the two would be the Senior Wrangler. And at length their confident prediction was verified : for Mr. Southern was declared the victor, after a most severe struggle with his noble antagonist—NOBLE in every sense of the word—noble before, infinitely nobler after, this great contest, in which success had been, to his Lordship, an object on many accounts so dearly prized. From him Mr. Southern received the first and heartiest of the congratulations which were soon from all quarters showered upon him. If ever a pure and high spirit were shown by man, it was that which then actuated Lord Alkmond ; and his modest, retiring, confused victor profoundly felt the generosity of his defeated but gifted antagonist.

Great curiosity was excited in the University about their new Senior Wrangler ; and “ Who is he ?—Where

does he come from?—Who knows anything about him?" were questions asked eagerly on every hand. Who, however, could answer them? Lord Alkmond was repeatedly asked—but, in spite of his apparent acquaintanceship with his victorious opponent, could give no information about him. Curiosity was raised to a very high pitch on the day after this great contest, when Mr. Southern was seen walking along the streets, his face exhibiting traces of strong and recent excitement and agitation, and he arm-in-arm with a tall, elderly, grey-haired man, with a melancholy countenance, and a very homely appearance. The latter, also, looked as if he had not yet recovered from agitation: there was in his features a mingled expression of grief and exultation; and the two were observed frequently to gaze with sudden and strange earnestness at each other. During the course of that day, Lord Alkmond, walking arm-in-arm with Mr. Hylton, appeared also somewhat pale, and as if he too had been lately the subject of strong emotion, or had not recovered from the effects of some agitating intelligence. He shook hands with Mr. Southern in a very marked manner: evidently with cordiality, yet with a certain gravity which he had never before exhibited: and he took off his hat with a very courteous air, yet a concerned countenance, to the person with

whom Mr. Southern was walking. With a sudden impulse, however, his Lordship shook him cordially by the hand, and said, "Sir, allow me most earnestly to congratulate you on Mr. Southern's—I mean—Mr. Ayliffe's—I mean, your son's success—and long may you live to see the fruits of his distinction!" The person addressed bowed low, and in his turn looked greatly embarrassed. Nor was this all the food which events seemed to have provided for the lovers of mystery at the University, or in its neighbourhood. A very great dinner was given, two days after the contest for the Senior Wranglership, by the Duke and Duchess of Waverdale, who had come to a residence of theirs near the University, chiefly on account of the interest which they took in their relative Lord Alkmond. Several of the august Heads of Houses were there; and the conversation naturally turned upon the University struggle which had just closed.

"Our new Senior Wrangler is a man that hath dropped down among us from the moon, brimful of mathematics," said the Vice-Chancellor.

"He is a particular friend of mine," replied the brilliant Duchess of Waverdale, with sudden and visible emotion, her eyes filling with tears—"and he was invited to dinner here to-day, but has an engagement which all who know him must re-

spect him for keeping. Do they not, dear Mr. Hylton?"

"Indeed, my dear Duchess, they do! I shall never forget yesterday—or rather, the day before! I am thinking very anxiously about—you know whom!—What will *he* say of it?"

"Let us drink health and prosperity to the new Senior Wrangler," said the Duke, somewhat abruptly, glancing significantly at the Duchess; "for he is an honour to your University. Come, my dear Alkmond"—

"Indeed I will—with my entire heart," he replied. "I shall ever feel an inexpressible interest in Mr. — Southern."

The Heads all looked at one another with a well-bred air of mystery, as though they had hit upon a problem that would bear discussing by-and-bye. But one thing occurred to them all, that Mr. Southern was a person very fit to be friendly with, and on whom a little civility might be bestowed not unadvantageously. On the next evening, it got noised about that Lord Alkmond, Mr. Southern, and the strange-looking person with whom he walked about so much, had all dined together at the inn: and it somehow or other got known that conversation was particularly restrained and formal, so long as dinner was on

the table, but seemed afterwards more earnest. And the next day the whole party quitted Cambridge in a carriage and four! Such, indeed, was the fact; and their destination was Milverstoke—whither Lord Alkmond very anxiously hastened to give an account of the defeat which he had sustained, to his grandfather, and prepare him to hear by whom, in the strange course of events, that defeat had been occasioned, Mr. Hylton promising his assistance in the enterprise: for he knew, better even than the high-minded and frank-hearted young Viscount, the bitter mortification which was in store for the Earl, who seemed long to have set his heart upon his grandson's obtaining the distinction which his tutors had so confidently anticipated for him. The Earl had had, up to that moment, no knowledge whatever of young Ayliffe's being at the University: and how this fact, and that of his defeating Lord Alkmond, would be received by the Earl, was a problem which Mr. Hylton was about to solve with some trepidation; and that trepidation he had communicated to Lord Alkmond. "But," said his Lordship, "I will answer for my grandfather. When he hears it all—he may be a little angry about the concealment, but that can be most amiably accounted for: and then, if I know the nature of the blood that runs in our family, he may be somewhat

dissatisfied with me for my failure, but towards my distinguished opponent he will feel as becomes a gentleman." How differently turned out events from those for which they were preparing!—The Earl of Milverstoke was dead.

For some time before Mr. Hylton's departure for Cambridge, the Earl's health and spirits had seemed greatly depressed, which Mr. Hylton, and his Lordship's medical attendant, attributed to the excitement and agitation occasioned by the Ayliffes' return to Milverstoke, and anxiety about Lord Alkmond's success at the University. As to the former, immediately on the Earl's hearing of the return of the Ayliffes, he sent a message to Mr. Hylton, requesting him to take a chaise and bring with him Ayliffe and his wife to the Castle. This Mr. Hylton did; and the Earl's manner, in receiving and addressing them, was signally characterised by dignity and kindness.

"Remember always," said his Lordship, "it was not I that caused your arrest on the charge upon which you were tried, nor placed you in the situation which led to your being arrested. You were fairly and openly tried by your equals, as every Englishman must be who is charged, whether rightly or wrongfully, with an offence. I, who had no part in your trial, verily believed you guilty: I do declare

it upon my honour—I do assure you of it solemnly before God : and I continued to believe it till the extraordinary confession of the crime, by the man whose cruelty first led you heedlessly astray. No man could force my understanding, Adam, to believe that you were innocent when I conscientiously believed that you were guilty, or guilty when I really believed that you were innocent : but I freely own, humbly and penitently, before God, that I have, ever since you were charged with my unhappy son's death, until very lately, felt a most unjustifiable animosity and vindictiveness towards both you and your exemplary father. Through the teaching of Mr. Hylton, and the blessing of God, I have lately, I trust, been greatly altered, and regard my past conduct with downright shame and grief. But Christ my Saviour hath looked upon me in mercy, and softened (I trust) a heart that was a heart of stone. I hope that the consolations of religion are yours, and that they have been during your banishment ; and now that you are returned, I hope that peace will attend you both—nay, all of you—for the rest of your days. I am a very great sinner,”—here the Earl became greatly affected, turned very pale, and paused for a while : then he proceeded in a broken voice—“ I am a much greater sinner than you think of, or than probably any one now knows of, but

my kind, pitying friend, Mr. Hylton. But I have repented—ay, in dust and ashes; and may God accept of my repentance. I am not much longer for this world. Would I had led a better life, and set a better example to those around me. And now, do you, both of you, heartily forgive me, my friends—my long-oppressed, my excellent and greatly pitied friends?”

Both Ayliffe and his wife, whom the Earl had made to sit down near him when they entered, were in tears all the while that the Earl was speaking: for there was something indescribably touching and solemn in the tones of his voice, and the expression of his countenance. They fervently assured his Lordship that all was forgotten in the joy of their returning; and with the bloody stain of guilt blotted out.

“Then may God Almighty bless you both, my poor persecuted friends! bless you here and hereafter, and prepare you for that day which I feel is drawing awfully near to me! Pray for me while I am with you; and when I am dead, continue in a kind and forgiving spirit, and be gentle to my memory. He that will succeed me will behave more worthily in his station than I have. I am not deserving of such a grandson! But I am faint, and must bid you farewell. Give me your hands, my friends; and when you return home,

here is a little token a-piece for you, of my good will, and an earnest only of what I will do for you!" Then he gave to each a small sealed packet, and they withdrew, leaving him much exhausted. The Earl had given each of them bank-notes to the amount of 500*l*.

When Mr. Hylton had set off for Cambridge with Adam Ayliffe (whose accompanying him was not known to the Earl), Lady Alkmond, who was from the first acquainted with the secret concerning him, who had become unexpectedly so formidable a competitor with her son, resolved, being left alone with the Earl, and seeing his subdued and gentle temper, herself to break the whole matter to him; and this she did so judiciously, and with such winning tenderness, that the Earl expressed only great, very great surprise, but no anger whatever. He was, on the contrary, much affected by the silent unostentatious generosity of his daughter, the Duchess of Waverdale. When the news came that Lord Alkmond had been defeated, and by young Ayliffe, Lady Alkmond shed a flood of tears; and with a mother's fondness lamented the grievous disappointment of their proud and ambitious hopes. When she had sufficiently recovered her self-possession, she went to the Earl, and broke the tidings to him as gently as possible. He was then lying in the bed from which he was destined never to rise; and

received the intelligence with perfect calmness, though a faint flush at first overspread his features. The first words he uttered, after tenderly folding his arms round Lady Alkmond, and kissing her, were only these:—"This God hath done, and as a scourge for my pride! As such I humbly receive it. God bless the boy: may God bless them both! Oh, send for him! my daughter! my friend Hylton!"—

The next day the Doctor told Lady Alkmond that he had noticed a striking alteration in the Earl's countenance, and advised her to prepare for a great change. Other medical assistance was sent for, and an express was dispatched for Lord Alkmond, the Duchess of Waverdale, and Mr. Hylton. The Earl's solicitor was also summoned, and remained alone for some little time with his Lordship, who caused some additions to be made to his will. The Earl, getting worse, directed his confidential servant to go in the coach, to the cottage of old Adam Ayliffe, with an entreaty to him to come, in remembrance of a promise which he had made to the Earl of Milverstoke some time before.

On hearing this, the old man trembled, and covered his face with his hands for some moments. Then, with a solemn countenance, getting his hat and stick, and putting his Bible under his arm, he said, "Ay, I will go with thee to my Lord!"

When the Earl saw him it was about evening, and the sun was setting, and its declining rays shone softly into the room.

“Adam, see—it is going down!” said Lord Milverstone in a low tone, looking sadly at Adam, and pointing to the sun.

“How is thy soul with God?” said the old man, with great solemnity.

The Earl placed his hands together, and remained silent for some moments. Then he said, “I would it were, good Adam, as I believe thine is!”

“Nay, my good Lord, think only of thine own, not mine; I am sinful, and often of weak faith. But hast thou faith and hope?”

“I thank God, Adam, that I have some little! Before I was afflicted, I went astray! But I have sinned deeper than even thou thinkest, good soul!”

“But His mercy, to whom thou art going, is deeper than thy sins!”

“Oh, Adam! I have this day often thought that I could die more peacefully in thy little cottage than in this place!”

“So thy heart and soul be right, what signifies where thou diest?”

“Adam,” said the Earl, gently, “thou speakest somewhat sternly to one with a broken spirit—but

God bless thee! thy voice searcheth me! Wilt thou make me a promise, Adam?" said the Earl, softly placing his hand in that of Ayliffe.

"Ay, my Lord, if I can perform it."

"Wilt thou follow me to the grave? I would have followed thee, hadst thou gone first!"

"I will!" replied Adam, looking solemnly at the Earl.

"And now give me thy prayers, dear Adam! Pray for him that—is to come after me—for I go—and in peace—in peace"—

Lady Alkmond, who was at the other side of the bed, observed a great change come suddenly over the Earl's face, while Adam was opening the Bible and adjusting his glasses to read a Psalm. She hastened round, she leaned down and kissed the Earl's forehead and cheek, grasped his thin fingers, and burst into weeping. But the Earl saw her not, nor heard her: he was no longer among the living.

The Earl of Milverstoke left to the Ayliffes the munificent bequest of ten thousand pounds, which he styled in his will "an humble peace-offering." He also directed that all the land which had been purchased on his account, from old Ayliffe, should be re-

conveyed to him, free of every charge : and bequeathed twenty pounds for a tablet to be erected in the church, to the memory of old Adam Ayliffe, the inscription on which was to be written by Mr. Hylton. Concerning him, his Lordship said, that he left the Rev. Henry Hylton his affectionate and most unworthy blessing ; grieving that he had made the Earl promise to leave him no money, on hearing from his Lordship that such was his intention. But his Lordship left Mary Hylton, the daughter of his dear friend, the Rev. Henry Hylton, five thousand pounds.

It cost the venerable Mr. Hylton a great effort to comply with the wishes of the new Earl of Milverstoke, and his sorrowful relatives, that he should bury his late friend. But he did ; and old Adam Ayliffe went as one of the mourners, and stood with a majestic countenance, only a few yards from the spot where, within three months' time, he was himself laid, that he might take his rest beside her whom he had loved, till both—till all mankind—shall rise at the sound of the trumpet of the Resurrection. He died with noble calmness. His very dead countenance diffused a living peace around the room ; for its expression was that of a heavenly serenity. Him also Mr. Hylton buried ; the young Earl of Milverstoke joining with Adam Ayliffe, and his son, in following his honoured

remains through a little concourse, in the churchyard, who wept silently as they passed.

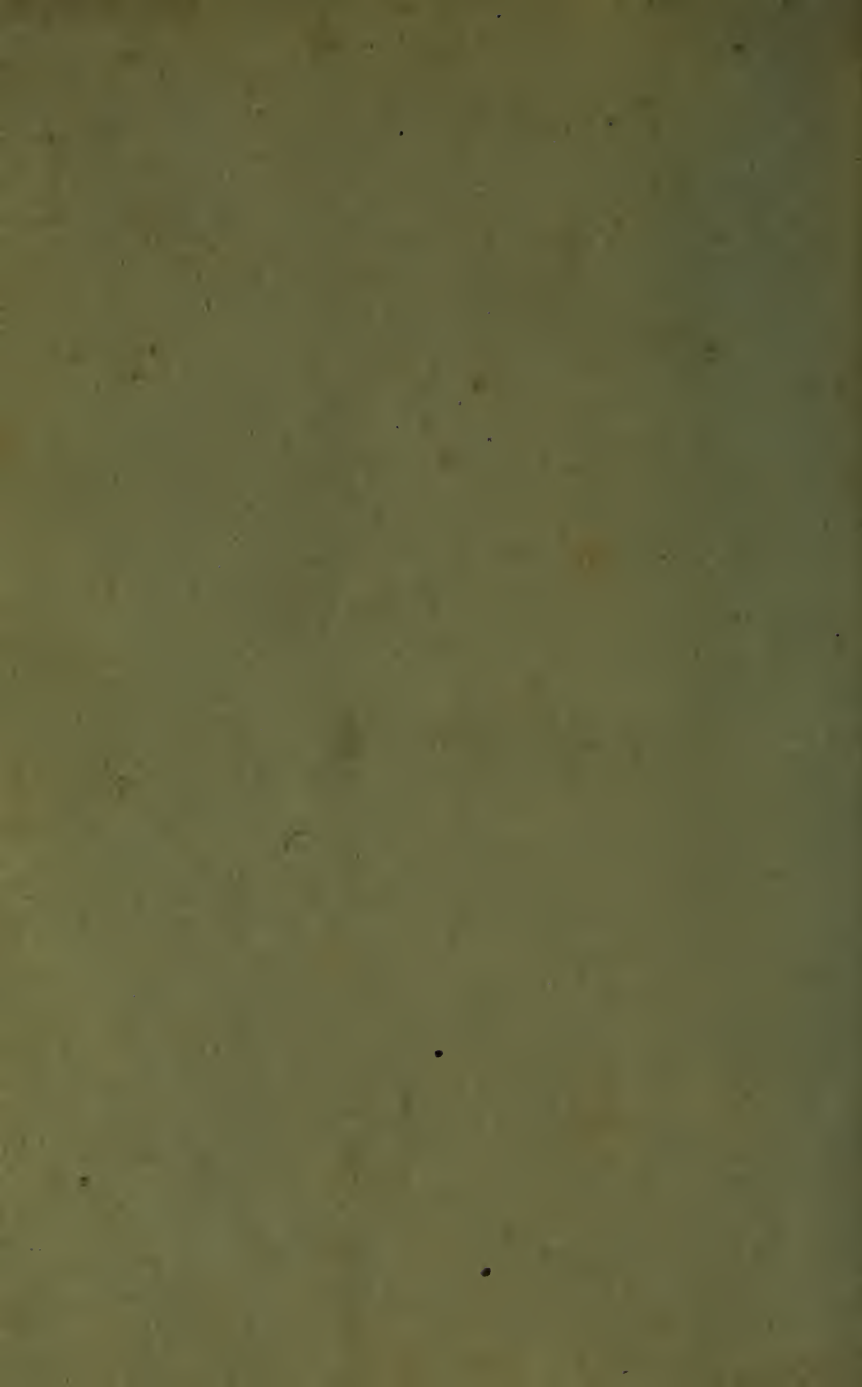
All those here mentioned are long since mouldered into dust—their kindred dust. They are dead, but have not perished: being only asleep. Perhaps already, they see no longer through a glass, darkly, but face to face: knowing no longer in part, but even as they are known. We, who have come after them, see also, at present, as they saw, only through a glass, darkly: wherefore we look for full clearness, hereafter only: and till our sleeping time come, walk trembling, but hopefully.

THE END.













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